A NORTH-COUNTRY OMNIBUS

A NORTH-COUNTRY OMNIBUS

containing three complete novels

by

JAMES OLIVER CURWOOD

THE RIVER'S END

THE VALLEY OF SILENT MEN

THE FLAMING FOREST

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The River's End

THE RIVER'S END

I

BETWEEN Conniston, of His Majesty's Royal Northwest Mounted Police, and Keith, the outlaw, there was a striking physical and facial resemblance. Both had observed it, of course. It gave them a sort of confidence in each other. Between them it hovered in a subtle and unanalyzed presence that was constantly suggesting to Conniston a line of action that would have made him a traitor to his oath of duty. For nearly a month he had crushed down the whispered temptings of this thing between them. He represented the law. He was the law. For twenty-seven months he had followed Keith, and always there had been in his mind that parting injunction of the splendid service of which he was a part—"Don't come back until you get your man, dead or alive." Otherwise——

A racking cough split in upon his

thoughts. He sat up on the edge of his cot, and at the gasping cry of pain that came with the red stain of blood on his lips Keith went to him and with a strong arm supported his shoulders. He said nothing, and after a moment Conniston wiped the stain away and laughed softly, even before the shadow of pain had faded from his eyes. One of his hands rested on a wrist that still bore the ring-mark of a handcuff. The sight of it brought him back to grim reality. After all, fate was playing whimsically as well as tragically with their destinies.

"Thanks, old top," he said. "Thanks."

His fingers closed over the manacle-marked wrist.

Over their heads the arctic storm was crashing in a mighty fury, as if striving to beat down the little cabin that had dared to rear itself in the dun-gray emptiness at the top of the world, eight hundred miles from civilization. There were curious wailings, strange screeching sounds, and heart-breaking moanings in its strife, and when at last its passion died away and there followed a strange quiet, the two

men could feel the frozen earth under their feet shiver with the rumbling reverberations of the crashing and breaking fields of ice out in Hudson's Bay. With it came a dull and steady roar, like the incessant rumble of a far battle, broken now and then—when an ice mountain split asunder—with a report like that of a sixteen-inch gun. Down through the Roes Welcome into Hudson's Bay countless billions of tons of ice were rending their way like Hunnish armies in the break-up.

"You'd better lie down," suggested Keith.

Conniston, instead, rose slowly to his feet and went to a table on which a seal-oil lamp was burning. He swayed a little as he walked. He sat down, and Keith seated himself opposite him. Between them lay a worn deck of cards. As Conniston fumbled them in his fingers, he looked straight across at Keith and grinned.

"It's queer, devilish queer," he said. "Don't you think so, Keith?" He was an Englishman, and his blue eyes shone with a grim, cold humor. "And funny," he added.

"Queer, but not funny," partly agreed Keith.

"Yes, it is funny," maintained Conniston. "Just twenty-seven months ago, lacking three days, I was sent out to get you, Keith. I was told to bring you in dead or alive—and at the end of the twenty-sixth month I got you, alive. And as a sporting proposition you deserve a hundred years of life instead of the noose, Keith, for you led me a chase that took me through seven different kinds of hell before I landed you. I froze, and I starved, and I drowned. I haven't seen a white woman's face in eighteen months. It was terrible. But I beat you at last. That's the jolly good part of it, Keith—I beat you and *got* you, and there's the proof of it on your wrists this minute. I won. Do you concede that? You must be fair, old top, because this is the last big game I'll ever play." There was a break, a yearning that was almost plaintive, in his voice.

Keith nodded. "You won," he said. "You won so square that when the frost got your lung——"

"You didn't take advantage of me," in-

terrupted Conniston. "That's the funny part of it, Keith. That's where the humor comes in. I had you all tied up and scheduled for the hangman when—bing! —along comes a cold snap that bites a corner of my lung, and the tables are turned. And instead of doing to me as I was going to do to you, instead of killing me or making your getaway while I was helpless—Keith—old pal—*you've tried to nurse me back to life!* Isn't that funny? Could anything be funnier?"

He reached a hand across the table and gripped Keith's. And then, for a few moments, he bowed his head while his body was convulsed by another racking cough. Keith sensed the pain of it in the convulsive clutching of Conniston's fingers about his own. When Conniston raised his face, the red stain was on his lips again.

"You see, I've got it figured out to the day," he went on, wiping away the stain with a cloth already dyed red. "This is Thursday. I won't see another Sunday. It'll come Friday night or some time Saturday. I've seen this frosted lung business a dozen times. Understand? I've got two

sure days ahead of me, possibly a third. Then you'll have to dig a hole and bury me. After that you will no longer be held by the word of honor you gave me when I slipped off your manacles. And I'm asking you—*what are you going to do?*"

In Keith's face were written deeply the lines of suffering and of tragedy. Yesterday they had compared ages. He was thirty-eight, only a little younger than the man who had run him down and who in the hour of his achievement was dying. They had not put the fact plainly before. It had been a matter of some little embarrassment for Keith, who at another time had found it easier to kill a man than to tell this man that he was going to die. Now that Conniston had measured his own span definitely and with most amazing coolness, a load was lifted from Keith's shoulders. Over the table they looked into each other's eyes, and this time it was Keith's fingers that tightened about Conniston's. They looked like brothers in the sickly glow of the seal-oil lamp.

"What are you going to do?" repeated Conniston.

Keith's face aged even as the dying Englishman stared at him. "I suppose—I'll go back," he said heavily.

"You mean to Coronation Gulf? You'll return to that stinking mess of Eskimo igloos? If you do, you'll go mad!"

"I expect to," said Keith. "But it's the only thing left. You know that. You of all men must know how they've hunted me. If I went south——"

It was Conniston's turn to nod his head, slowly and thoughtfully. "Yes, of course," he agreed. "They're hunting you hard, and you're giving 'em a bully chase. But they'll get you, even up there. And I'm—sorry."

Their hands unclasped. Conniston filled his pipe and lighted it. Keith noticed that he held the lighted taper without a tremor. The nerve of the man was magnificent.

"I'm sorry," he said again. "I—like you. Do you know, Keith, I wish we'd been born brothers and you hadn't killed a man. That night I slipped the ring-dogs on you I felt almost like a devil. I wouldn't say it if it wasn't for this bally lung. But what's the use of keeping it

back now? It doesn't seem fair to keep a man up in that place for three years, running from hole to hole like a rat, and then take him down for a hanging. I know it isn't fair in your case. I feel it. I don't mean to be inquisitive, old chap, but I'm not believing Departmental 'facts' any more. I'd make a topping good wager you're not the sort they make you out. And so I'd like to know—just why—you killed Judge Kirkstone?"

Keith's two fists knotted in the center of the table. Conniston saw his blue eyes darken for an instant with a savage fire. In that moment there came a strange silence over the cabin, and in that silence the incessant and maddening yapping of the little white foxes rose shrilly over the distant booming and rumbling of the ice.

II

"WHY did I kill Judge Kirkstone?" Keith repeated the words slowly. His clenched hands relaxed, but his eyes held the steady glow of fire. "What do the Departmental 'facts' tell you, Conniston?"

"That you murdered him in cold blood, and that the honor of the Service is at stake until you are hung."

"There's a lot in the view-point, isn't there? What if I said I didn't kill Judge Kirkstone?"

Conniston leaned forward a little too eagerly. The deadly paroxysm shook his frame again, and when it was over his breath came pantingly, as if hissing through a sieve. "My God, not Sunday —or Saturday," he breathed. "Keith, it's coming *tomorrow!*"

"No, no, not then," said Keith, choking back something that rose in his throat. "You'd better lie down again."

Conniston gathered new strength. "And die like a rabbit? No, thank you, old chap! I'm after facts, and you can't lie to a dying man. Did you kill Judge Kirkstone?"

"I—don't—know," replied Keith slowly, looking steadily into the other's eyes. "I think so, and yet I am not positive. I went to his home that night with the determination to wring justice from him or kill him. I wish you could look at it all with my eyes, Conniston. You could if you had known my father. You see, my mother died when I was a little chap, and my father and I grew up together, chums. I don't believe I ever thought of him as just simply a father. Fathers are common. He was more than that. From the time I was ten years old we were inseparable. I guess I was twenty before he told me of the deadly feud that existed between him and Kirkstone, and it never troubled me much—because I didn't think anything would ever come of it—until Kirkstone got him. Then I realized that all through the years the old rattlesnake had been watching for his chance. It was a frame-up

from beginning to end, and my father stepped into the trap. Even then he thought that his political enemies, and not Kirkstone, were at the bottom of it. We soon discovered the truth. My father got ten years. He was innocent. And the only man on earth who could prove his innocence was Kirkstone, the man who was gloating like a Shylock over his pound of flesh. Conniston, if you had known these things and had been in my shoes, what would you have done?"

Conniston, lighting another taper over the oil flame, hesitated and answered: "I don't know yet, old chap. What did you do?"

"I fairly got down on my knees to the scoundrel," resumed Keith. "If ever a man begged for another man's life, I begged for my father's—for the few words from Kirkstone that would set him free. I offered everything I had in the world, even my body and soul. God, I'll never forget that night! He sat there, fat and oily, two big rings on his stubby fingers—a monstrous toad in human form—and he chuckled and laughed at me in his joy, as

though I were a mountebank playing amusing tricks for him—and there my soul was bleeding itself out before his eyes! And his son came in, fat and oily and accursed like his father, and *he* laughed at me. I didn't know that such hatred could exist in the world, or that vengeance could bring such hellish joy. I could still hear their gloating laughter when I stumbled out into the night. It haunted me. I heard it in the trees. It came in the wind. My brain was filled with it—and suddenly I turned back, and I went into that house again without knocking, and I faced the two of them alone once more in that room. And this time, Conniston, I went back to get justice—or to kill. Thus far it was premeditated, but I went with my naked hands. There was a key in the door, and I locked it. Then I made my demand. I wasted no words——"

Keith rose from the table and began to pace back and forth. The wind had died again. They could hear the yapping of the foxes and the low thunder of the ice.

"The son began it," said Keith. "He

sprang at me. I struck him. We grappled, and then the beast himself leaped at me with some sort of weapon in his hand. I couldn't see what it was, but it was heavy. The first blow almost broke my shoulder. In the scuffle I wrenched it from his hand, and then I found it was a long, rectangular bar of copper made for a paper-weight. In that same instant I saw the son snatch up a similar object from the table, and in the act he smashed the table light. In darkness we fought. I did not feel that I was fighting men. They were monsters and gave me the horrible sensation of being in darkness with crawling serpents. Yes, I struck hard. And the son was striking, and neither of us could see. I felt my weapon hit, and it was then that Kirkstone crumpled down with a blubbery wheeze. You know what happened after that. The next morning only one copper weight was found in that room. The son had done away with the other. And the one that was left was covered with Kirkstone's blood and hair. There was no chance for me. So I got away. Six

months later my father died in prison, and for three years I've been hunted as a fox is hunted by the hounds. That's all, Conniston. Did I kill Judge Kirkstone? And, if I killed him, do you think I'm sorry for it, even though I hang?"

"Sit down!"

The Englishman's voice was commanding. Keith dropped back to his seat, breathing hard. He saw a strange light in the steely blue eyes of Conniston.

"Keith, when a man knows he's going to live, he is blind to a lot of things. But when he knows he's going to die, it's different. If you had told me that story a month ago, I'd have taken you down to the hangman just the same. It would have been my duty, you know, and I might have argued you were lying. But you can't lie to me—now. Kirkstone deserved to die. And so I've made up my mind what you're going to do. You're not going back to Coronation Gulf. You're going south. You're going back into God's country again. And you're not going as John Keith, the murderer, but as Derwent Conniston of His Majesty's Royal Northwest

Mounted Police! Do you get me, Keith? Do you understand?"

Keith simply stared. The Englishman twisted a mustache, a half-humorous gleam in his eyes. He had been thinking of this plan of his for some time, and he had foreseen just how it would take Keith off his feet.

"Quite a scheme, don't you think, old chap? I like you. I don't mind saying I think a lot of you, and there isn't any reason on earth why you shouldn't go on living in my shoes. There's no moral objection. No one will miss me. I was the black sheep back in England—younger brother and all that—and when I had to choose between Africa and Canada, I chose Canada. An Englishman's pride is the biggest fool thing on earth, Keith, and I suppose all of them over there think I'm dead. They haven't heard from me in six or seven years. I'm forgotten. And the beautiful thing about this scheme is that we look so deucedly alike, you know. Trim that mustache and beard of yours a little, add a bit of a scar over your right eye, and you can walk in on old McDowell

himself, and I'll wager he'll jump up and say, 'Bless my heart, if it isn't Conniston!' That's all I've got to leave you, Keith, a dead man's clothes and name. But you're welcome. They'll be of no more use to me after tomorrow."

"Impossible!" gasped Keith. "Conniston, do you know what you are saying?"

"Positively, old chap. I count every word, because it hurts when I talk. So you won't argue with me, please. It's the biggest sporting thing that's ever come my way. I'll be dead. You can bury me under this floor, where the foxes can't get at me. But my name will go on living and you'll wear my clothes back to civilization and tell McDowell how you got your man and how he died up here with a frosted lung. As proof of it you'll lug your own clothes down in a bundle along with any other little identifying things you may have, and there's a sergeancy waiting. McDowell promised it to you—if you got your man. Understand? And McDowell hasn't seen me for two years and three months, so if I *might* look a bit different to him, it would be natural, for you and I

have been on the rough edge of the world all that time. The jolly good part of it all is that we look so much alike. I say the idea is splendid!"

Conniston rose above the presence of death in the thrill of the great gamble he was projecting. And Keith, whose heart was pounding like an excited fist, saw in a flash the amazing audacity of the thing that was in Conniston's mind, and felt the responsive thrill of its possibilities. No one down there would recognize in him the John Keith of four years ago. Then he was smooth-faced, with shoulders that stooped a little and a body that was not too strong. Now he was an animal! A four years' fight with the raw things of life had made him that, and inch for inch he measured up with Conniston. And Conniston, sitting opposite him, looked enough like him to be a twin brother. He seemed to read the thought in Keith's mind. There was an amused glitter in his eyes.

"I suppose it's largely because of the hair on our faces," he said. "You know a beard can cover a multitude of physical

sins—and differences, old chap. I wore mine two years before I started out after you, vandyked rather carefully, you understand, so you'd better not use a razor. Physically you won't run a ghost of a chance of being caught. You'll look the part. The real fun is coming in other ways. In the next twenty-four hours you've got to learn by heart the history of Derwent Conniston from the day he joined the Royal Mounted. We won't go back further than that, for it wouldn't interest you, and ancient history won't turn up to trouble you. Your biggest danger will be with McDowell, commanding F Division at Prince Albert. He's a human fox of the old military school, mustaches and all, and he can see through boiler-plate. But he's got a big heart. He has been a good friend of mine, so along with Derwent Conniston's story you've got to load up with a lot about McDowell, too. There are many things—*oh, God——*"

He flung a hand to his chest. Grim horror settled in the little cabin as the cough convulsed him. And over it the

wind shrieked again, swallowing up the yapping of the foxes and the rumble of the ice.

That night, in the yellow sputter of the seal-oil lamp, the fight began. Grim-faced —one realizing the nearness of death and struggling to hold it back, the other praying for time—two men went through the amazing process of trading their identities. From the beginning it was Conniston's fight. And Keith, looking at him, knew that in this last mighty effort to die game the Englishman was narrowing the slight margin of hours ahead of him. Keith had loved but one man, his father. In this fight he learned to love another, Conniston. And once he cried out bitterly that it was unfair, that Conniston should live and he should die. The dying Englishman smiled and laid a hand on his, and Keith felt that the hand was damp with a cold sweat.

Through the terrible hours that followed Keith felt the strength and courage of the dying man becoming slowly a part of himself. The thing was epic. Conniston, throttling his own agony, was mag-

nificent. And Keith felt his warped and despairing soul swelling with a new life and a new hope, and he was thrilled by the thought of what he must do to live up to the mark of the Englishman. Conniston's story was of the important things first. It began with his acquaintance with McDowell. And then, between the paroxysms that stained his lips red, he filled in with incident and smiled wanly as he told how McDowell had sworn him to secrecy once in the matter of an incident which the chief did not want the barracks to know—and laugh over. A very sensitive man in some ways was McDowell! At the end of the first hour Keith stood up in the middle of the floor, and with his arms resting on the table and his shoulders sagging Conniston put him through the drill. After that he gave Keith his worn Service Manual and commanded him to study while he rested. Keith helped him to his bunk, and for a time after that tried to read the Service book. But his eyes blurred, and his brain refused to obey. The agony in the Englishman's low breathing oppressed him with a physical pain.

Keith felt himself choking and rose at last from the table and went out into the gray, ghostly twilight of the night.

His lungs drank in the ice-tanged air. But it was not cold. *Kwaske-hoo*—the change—had come. The air was filled with the tumult of the last fight of winter against the invasion of spring, and the forces of winter were crumbling. The earth under Keith's feet trembled in the mighty throes of their dissolution. He could hear more clearly the roar and snarl and rending thunder of the great fields of ice as they swept down with the arctic current into Hudson's Bay. Over him hovered a strange night. It was not black but a weird and wraith-like gray, and out of this sepulchral chaos came strange sounds and the moaning of a wind high up. A little while longer, Keith thought, and the thing would have driven him mad. Even now he fancied he heard the screaming and wailing of voices far up under the hidden stars. More than once in the past months he had listened to the sobbing of little children, the agony of weeping women, and the taunting of wind voices

that were either tormenting or crying out in a ghoulish triumph; and more than once in those months he had seen Eskimos—born in that hell but driven mad in the torture of its long night—rend the clothes from their bodies and plunge naked out into the pitiless gloom and cold to die. Conniston would never know how near the final breakdown his brain had been in that hour when he made him a prisoner. And Keith had not told him. The man-hunter had saved him from going mad. But Keith had kept that secret to himself.

Even now he shrank down as a blast of wind shot out of the chaos above and smote the cabin with a shriek that had in it a peculiarly penetrating note. And then he squared his shoulders and laughed, and the yapping of the foxes no longer filled him with a shuddering torment. Beyond them he was seeing home. God's country! Green forests and waters spattered with golden sun—things he had almost forgotten; once more the faces of women who were white. And with those faces he heard the voice of his people and the song of birds and felt under his feet the velvety

touch of earth that was bathed in the aroma of flowers. Yes, he had almost forgotten those things. Yesterday they had been with him only as moldering skeletons—phantasmal dream-things—because he was going mad, but now they were real, they were just off there to the south, and he was going to them. He stretched up his arms, and a cry rose out of his throat. It was of triumph, of final exaltation. Three years of *that*—and he had lived through it! Three years of dodging from burrow to burrow, just as Conniston had said, like a hunted fox; three years of starvation, of freezing, of loneliness so great that his soul had broken—and now he was going home!

He turned again to the cabin, and when he entered the pale face of the dying Englishman greeted him from the dim glow of the yellow light at the table. And Conniston was smiling in a quizzical, distressed sort of way, with a hand at his chest. His open watch on the table pointed to the hour of midnight when the lesson went on.

Still later he heated the muzzle of his revolver in the flame of the seal-oil.

"It will hurt, old chap—putting this

scar over your eye. But it's got to be done. I say, won't it be a ripping joke on McDowell?" Softly he repeated it, smiling into Keith's eyes. "A ripping joke—on McDowell!"

III

DAWN—the dusk of another night—and Keith raised his haggard face from Conniston's bedside with a woman's sob on his lips. The Englishman had died as he knew that he would die, game to the last threadbare breath that came out of his body. For with this last breath he whispered the words which he had repeated a dozen times before, "Remember, old chap, you win or lose the moment McDowell first sets his eyes on you!" And then, with a strange kind of sob in his chest, he was gone, and Keith's eyes were blinded by the miracle of a hot flood of tears, and there rose in him a mighty pride in the name of Derwent Conniston.

It was his name now. John Keith was dead. It was Derwent Conniston who was living. And as he looked down into the cold, still face of the heroic Englishman, the thing did not seem so strange to him

after all. It would not be difficult to bear Conniston's name; the difficulty would be in living up to the Conniston code.

That night the rumble of the ice fields was clearer because there was no wind to deaden their tumult. The sky was cloudless, and the stars were like glaring, yellow eyes peering through holes in a vast, overhanging curtain of jet black. Keith, out to fill his lungs with air, looked up at the phenomenon of the polar night and shuddered. The stars were like living things, and they were looking at him. Under their sinister glow the foxes were holding high carnival. It seemed to Keith that they had drawn a closer circle about the cabin and that there was a different note in their yapping now, a note that was more persistent, more horrible. Conniston had foreseen that closing-in of the little white beasts of the night, and Keith, reëntering the cabin, set about the fulfillment of his promise. Ghostly dawn found his task completed.

Half an hour later he stood in the edge of the scrub timber that rimmed in the arctic plain, and looked for the last time

upon the little cabin under the floor of which the Englishman was buried. It stood there splendidly unafraid in its terrible loneliness, a proud monument to a dead man's courage and a dead man's soul. Within its four walls it treasured a thing which gave to it at last a reason for being, a reason for fighting against dissolution as long as one log could hold upon another. Conniston's spirit had become a living part of it, and the foxes might yap everlastingly, and the winds howl, and winter follow winter, and long night follow long night—and it would stand there in its pride fighting to the last, a memorial to Derwent Conniston, the Englishman.

Looking back at it, Keith bared his head in the raw dawn. "God bless you, Conniston," he whispered, and turned slowly away and into the south.

Ahead of him was eight hundred miles of wilderness—eight hundred miles between him and the little town on the Saskatchewan where McDowell commanded F Division of the Royal Mounted. The thought of distance did not appal him. Four years at the top of the earth had ac-

customed him to the illimitable and had inured him to the lack of things. That winter Conniston had followed him with the tenacity of a ferret for a thousand miles along the rim of the Arctic, and it had been a miracle that he had not killed the Englishman. A score of times he might have ended the exciting chase without staining his own hands. His Eskimo friends would have performed the deed at a word. But he had let the Englishman live, and Conniston, dead, was sending him back home. Eight hundred miles was but the step between.

He had no dogs or sledge. His own team had given up the ghost long ago, and a treacherous Kogmollock from the Roes Welcome had stolen the Englishman's outfit in the last lap of their race down from Fullerton's Point. What he carried was Conniston's, with the exception of his rifle and his own parka and hood. He even wore Conniston's watch. His pack was light. The chief articles it contained were a little flour, a three-pound tent, a sleeping-bag, and certain articles of identification to prove the death of John Keith, the

outlaw. Hour after hour of that first day the zip, zip, zip of his snowshoes beat with deadly monotony upon his brain. He could not think. Time and again it seemed to him that something was pulling him back, and always he was hearing Conniston's voice and seeing Conniston's face in the gray gloom of the day about him. He passed through the slim finger of scrub timber that a strange freak of nature had flung across the plain, and once more was a moving speck in a wide and wind-swept barren. In the afternoon he made out a dark rim on the southern horizon and knew it was timber, real timber, the first he had seen since that day, a year and a half ago, when the last of the Mackenzie River forest had faded away behind him! It gave him, at last, something tangible to grip. It was a thing beckoning to him, a sentient, living wall beyond which was his other world. The eight hundred miles meant less to him than the space between himself and that growing, black rim on the horizon.

He reached it as the twilight of the day was dissolving into the deeper dusk of the

night, and put up his tent in the shelter of a clump of gnarled and storm-beaten spruce. Then he gathered wood and built himself a fire. He did not count the sticks as he had counted them for eighteen months. He was wasteful, prodigal. He had traveled forty miles since morning but he felt no exhaustion. He gathered wood until he had a great pile of it, and the flames of his fire leaped higher and higher until the spruce needles crackled and hissed over his head. He boiled a pot of weak tea and made a supper of caribou meat and a bit of bannock. Then he sat with his back to a tree and stared into the flames.

The fire leaping and crackling before his eyes was like a powerful medicine. It stirred things that had lain dormant within him. It consumed the heavy dross of four years of stupefying torture and brought back to him vividly the happenings of a yesterday that had dragged itself on like a century. All at once he seemed unburdened of shackles that had weighted him down to the point of madness. Every fiber in his body responded to that glorious

roar of the fire; a thing seemed to snap in his head, freeing it of an oppressive bondage, and in the heart of the flames he saw home, and hope, and life—the things familiar and precious long ago, which the scourge of the north had almost beaten dead in his memory. He saw the broad Saskatchewan shimmering its way through the yellow plains, banked in by the foothills and the golden mists of morning dawn; he saw his home town clinging to its shore on one side and with its back against the purple wilderness on the other; he heard the rhythmic chug, chug, chug of the old gold dredge and the rattle of its chains as it devoured its tons of sand for a few grains of treasure; over him there were lacy clouds in a blue heaven again, he heard the sound of voices, the tread of feet, laughter—life. His soul reborn, he rose to his feet and stretched his arms until the muscles snapped. No, they would not know him back there—now! He laughed softly as he thought of the old John Keith—"Johnny" they used to call him up and down the few balsam-scented streets—his father's right-

hand man mentally but a little off feed, as his chum, Reddy McTabb, used to say, when it came to the matter of muscle and brawn. He could look back on things without excitement now. Even hatred had burned itself out, and he found himself wondering if old Judge Kirkstone's house looked the same on the top of the hill, and if Miriam Kirkstone had come back to live there after that terrible night when he had returned to avenge his father. Four years! It was not so very long, though the years had seemed like a lifetime to him. There would not be many changes. Everything would be the same—everything—except—the old home. That home he and his father had planned, and they had overseen the building of it, a château of logs a little distance from the town, with the Saskatchewan sweeping below it and the forest at its doors. Masterless, it must have seen changes in those four years.

Fumbling in his pocket, his fingers touched Conniston's watch. He drew it out and let the firelight play on the open dial. It was ten o'clock. In the back of

the premier half of the case Conniston had at some time or another pasted a picture. It must have been a long time ago, for the face was faded and indistinct. The eyes alone were undimmed, and in the flash of the fire they took on a living glow as they looked at Keith. It was the face of a young girl—a schoolgirl, Keith thought, of ten or twelve. Yet the eyes seemed older; they seemed pleading with someone, speaking a message that had come spontaneously out of the soul of the child. Keith closed the watch. Its tick, tick, tick rose louder to his ears. He dropped it in his pocket. He could still hear it.

A pitch-filled spruce knot exploded with the startling vividness of a star bomb, and with it came a dull sort of mental shock to Keith. He was sure that for an instant he had seen Conniston's face and that the Englishman's eyes were looking at him as the eyes had looked at him out of the face in the watch. The *deceptio visus* was so real that it sent him back a step, staring, and then, his eyes striving to catch the illusion again, there fell upon him a realization of the tremendous strain he had been

under for many hours. It had been days since he had slept soundly. Yet he was not sleepy now; he scarcely felt fatigue. The instinct of self-preservation made him arrange his sleeping-bag on a carpet of spruce boughs in the tent and go to bed.

Even then, for a long time, he lay in the grip of a harrowing wakefulness. He closed his eyes, but it was impossible for him to hold them closed. The sounds of the night came to him with painful distinctness—the crackling of the fire, the serpent-like hiss of the flaming pitch, the whispering of the tree tops, and the steady tick, tick, tick of Conniston's watch. And out on the barren, through the rim of sheltering trees, the wind was beginning to moan its everlasting whimper and sob of loneliness. In spite of his clenched hands and his fighting determination to hold it off, Keith fancied that he heard again—riding strangely in that wind—the sound of Conniston's voice. And suddenly he asked himself: What did it mean? What was it that Conniston had forgotten? What was it that Conniston had been try-

ing to tell him all that day, when he had felt the presence of him in the gloom of the Barrens? Was it that Conniston wanted him to come back?

He tried to rid himself of the depressing insistence of that thought. And yet he was certain that in the last half-hour before death entered the cabin the Englishman had wanted to tell him something and had crucified the desire. There was the triumph of an iron courage in those last words, "Remember, old chap, you win or lose the moment McDowell first sets his eyes on you!"—but in the next instant, as death sent home its thrust, Keith had caught a glimpse of Conniston's naked soul, and in that final moment when speech was gone forever, he knew that Conniston was fighting to make his lips utter words which he had left unspoken until too late. And Keith, listening to the moaning of the wind and the crackling of the fire, found himself repeating over and over again, "What was it he wanted to say?"

In a lull in the wind Conniston's watch seemed to beat like a heart in its case, and swiftly its tick, tick, ticked to his ears an

answer, "Come back, come back, come back!"

With a cry at his own pitiable weakness, Keith thrust the thing far under his sleeping-bag, and there its sound was smothered. At last sleep overcame him like a restless anesthesia.

With the break of another day he came out of his tent and stirred the fire. There were still bits of burning ember, and these he fanned into life and added to their flame fresh fuel. He could not easily forget last night's torture, but its significance was gone. He laughed at his own folly and wondered what Conniston himself would have thought of his nervousness. For the first time in years he thought of the old days down at college where, among other things, he had made a mark for himself in psychology. He had considered himself an expert in the discussion and understanding of phenomena of the mind. Afterward he had lived up to the mark and had profited by his beliefs, and the fact that a simple relaxation of his mental machinery had so disturbed him last night amused him now. The solution was easy.

It was his mind struggling to equilibrium after four years of brain-fag. And he felt better. His brain was clearer. He listened to the watch and found its ticking natural. He braced himself to another effort and whistled as he prepared his breakfast.

After that he packed his dunnage and continued south. He wondered if Conniston ever knew his Manual as he learned it now. At the end of the sixth day he could repeat it from cover to cover. Every hour he made it a practice to stop short and salute the trees about him. McDowell would not catch him there.

"I am Derwent Conniston," he kept telling himself. "John Keith is dead—dead. I buried him back there under the cabin, the cabin built by Sergeant Trossy and his patrol in nineteen hundred and eight. My name is Conniston—Derwent Conniston."

In his years of aloneness he had grown into the habit of talking to himself—or with himself—to keep up his courage and sanity. "Keith, old boy, we've got to fight it out," he would say. Now it was, "Conniston, old chap, we'll win or die." After

the third day, he never spoke of John Keith except as a man who was dead. And over the dead John Keith he spread Coniston's mantle. "John Keith died game, sir," he said to McDowell, who was a tree. "He was the finest chap I ever knew."

On this sixth day came the miracle. For the first time in many months John Keith saw the sun. He had seen the murky glow of it before this, fighting to break through the pall of fog and haze that hung over the Barrens, but this sixth day it was the sun, the real sun, bursting in all its glory for a short space over the northern world. Each day after this the sun was nearer and warmer, as the arctic vapor clouds and frost smoke were left farther behind, and not until he had passed beyond the ice fogs entirely did Keith swing westward. He did not hurry, for now that he was out of his prison, he wanted time in which to feel the first exhilarating thrill of his freedom. And more than all else he knew that he must measure and test himself for the tremendous fight ahead of him.

Now that the sun and the blue sky had cleared his brain, he saw the hundred pit-

falls in his way, the hundred little slips that might be made, the hundred traps waiting for any chance blunder on his part. Deliberately he was on his way to the hangman. Down there—every day of his life—he would rub elbows with him as he passed his fellow men in the street. He would never completely feel himself out of the presence of death. Day and night he must watch himself and guard himself, his tongue, his feet, his thoughts, never knowing in what hour the eyes of the law would pierce the veneer of his disguise and deliver his life as the forfeit. There were times when the contemplation of these things appalled him, and his mind turned to other channels of escape. And then—always—he heard Conniston's cool, fighting voice, and the red blood fired up in his veins, and he faced home.

He was Derwent Conniston. And never for an hour could he put out of his mind the one great mystifying question in this adventure of life and death, who was Derwent Conniston? Shred by shred he pieced together what little he knew, and always he arrived at the same futile end.

An Englishman, dead to his family if he had one, an outcast or an expatriate—and the finest, bravest gentleman he had ever known. It was the *whyfore* of these things that stirred within him an emotion which he had never experienced before. The Englishman had grimly and determinedly taken his secret to the grave with him. To him, John Keith—who was now Derwent Conniston—he had left an heritage of deep mystery and the mission, if he so chose, of discovering who he was, whence he had come—and why. Often he looked at the young girl's picture in the watch, and always he saw in her eyes something which made him think of Conniston as he lay in the last hour of his life. Undoubtedly the girl had grown into a woman now.

Days grew into weeks, and under Keith's feet the wet, sweet-smelling earth rose up through the last of the slush snow. Three hundred miles below the Barrens, he was in the Reindeer Lake country early in May. For a week he rested at a trapper's cabin on the Burntwood, and after that set out for Cumberland House. Ten days later he arrived at the post, and in the

sunlit glow of the second evening afterward he built his camp-fire on the shore of the yellow Saskatchewan.

The mighty river, beloved from the days of his boyhood, sang to him again, that night, the wonderful things that time and grief had dimmed in his heart. The moon rose over it, a warm wind drifted out of the south, and Keith, smoking his pipe, sat for a long time listening to the soft murmur of it as it rolled past at his feet. For him it had always been more than the river. He had grown up with it, and it had become a part of him; it had mothered his earliest dreams and ambitions; on it he had sought his first adventures; it had been his chum, his friend, and his comrade, and the fancy struck him that in the murmuring voice of it tonight there was a gladness, a welcome, an exultation in his return. He looked out on its silvery bars shimmering in the moonlight, and a flood of memories swept upon him. Thirty years was not so long ago that he could not remember the beautiful mother who had told him stories as the sun went down and bedtime drew near. And

vividly there stood out the wonderful tales of *Kistachiwun,* the river; how it was born away over in the mystery of the western mountains, away from the eyes and feet of men; how it came down from the mountains into the hills, and through the hills into the plains, broadening and deepening and growing mightier with every mile, until at last it swept past their door, bearing with it the golden grains of sand that made men rich. His father had pointed out the deep-beaten trails of buffalo to him and had told him stories of the Indians and of the land before white men came, so that between father and mother the river became his book of fables, his wonderland, the never-ending source of his treasured tales of childhood. And tonight the river was the one thing left to him. It was the one friend he could claim again, the one comrade he could open his arms to without fear of betrayal. And with the grief for things that once had lived and were now dead, there came over him a strange sort of happiness, the spirit of the great river itself giving him consolation.

Stretching out his arms, he cried: "My

old river—it's me—Johnny Keith! I've come back!"

And the river, whispering, seemed to answer him: "It's Johnny Keith! And he's come back! He's come back!"

IV

FOR a week John Keith followed up the shores of the Saskatchewan. It was a hundred and forty miles from the Hudson's Bay Company's post of Cumberland House to Prince Albert as the crow would fly, but Keith did not travel a homing line. Only now and then did he take advantage of a portage trail. Clinging to the river, his journey was lengthened by some sixty miles. Now that the hour for which Coniston had prepared him was so close at hand, he felt the need of this mighty, tongueless friend that had played such an intimate part in his life. It gave to him both courage and confidence, and in its company he could think more clearly. Nights he camped on its golden-yellow bars with the open stars over his head when he slept; his ears drank in the familiar sounds of long ago, for which he had yearned to the point of madness in his

exile—the soft cries of the birds that hunted and mated in the glow of the moon, the friendly twit, twit, twit of the low-flying sand-pipers, the hoot of the owls, and the splash and sleepy voice of wild-fowl already on their way up from the south. Out of that south, where in places the plains swept the forest back almost to the river's edge, he heard now and then the doglike barking of his little yellow friends of many an exciting horseback chase, the coyotes, and on the wilderness side, deep in the forest, the sinister howling of wolves. He was traveling, literally, the narrow pathway between two worlds. The river was that pathway. On the one hand, not so very far away, were the rolling prairies, green fields of grain, settlements and towns and the homes of men; on the other the wilderness lay to the water's edge with its doors still open to him. The seventh day a new sound came to his ears at dawn. It was the whistle of a train at Prince Albert.

There was no change in that whistle, and every nerve-string in his body responded to it with crying thrill. It was

the first voice to greet his home-coming, and the sound of it rolled the yesterdays back upon him in a deluge. He knew where he was now; he recalled exactly what he would find at the next turn in the river. A few minutes later he heard the wheezy chug, chug, chug of the old gold dredge at McCoffin's Bend. It would be the Betty M., of course, with old Andy Duggan at the windlass, his black pipe in mouth, still scooping up the shifting sands as he had scooped them up for more than twenty years. He could see Andy sitting at his post, clouded in a halo of tobacco smoke, a red-bearded, shaggy-headed giant of a man whom the town affectionately called the River Pirate. All his life Andy had spent in digging gold out of the mountains or the river, and like grim death he had hung to the bars above and below McCoffin's Bend. Keith smiled as he remembered old Andy's passion for bacon. One could always find the perfume of bacon about the Betty M., and when Duggan went to town, there were those who swore they could smell it in his whiskers.

Keith left the river trail now for the old logging road. In spite of his long fight to steel himself for what Conniston had called the "psychological moment," he felt himself in the grip of an uncomfortable mental excitement. At last he was face to face with the great gamble. In a few hours he would play his one card. If he won, there was life ahead of him again, if he lost—death. The old question which he had struggled to down surged upon him. Was it worth the chance? Was it in an hour of madness that he and Conniston had pledged themselves to this amazing adventure? The forest was still with him. He could turn back. The game had not yet gone so far that he could not withdraw his hand—and for a space a powerful impulse moved him. And then, coming suddenly to the edge of the clearing at McCoffin's Bend, he saw the dredge close inshore, and striding up from the beach Andy Duggan himself! In another moment Keith had stepped forth and was holding up a hand in greeting.

He felt his heart thumping in an unfamiliar way as Duggan came on. Was it

conceivable that the riverman would not recognize him? He forgot his beard, forgot the great change that four years had wrought in him. He remembered only that Duggan had been his friend, that a hundred times they had sat together in the quiet glow of long evenings, telling tales of the great river they both loved. And always Duggan's stories had been of that mystic paradise hidden away in the western mountains—the river's end, the paradise of golden lure, where the Saskatchewan was born amid towering peaks, and where Duggan—a long time ago—had quested for the treasure which he knew was hidden somewhere there. Four years had not changed Duggan. If anything his beard was redder and thicker and his hair shaggier than when Keith had last seen him. And then, following him from the Betsy M., Keith caught the everlasting scent of bacon. He devoured it in deep breaths. His soul cried out for it. Once he had grown tired of Duggan's bacon, but now he felt that he could go on eating it forever. As Duggan advanced, he was moved by a tremendous desire to stretch

out his hand and say: "I'm John Keith. Don't you know me, Duggan?" Instead, he choked back his desire and said, "Fine morning!"

Duggan nodded uncertainly. He was evidently puzzled at not being able to place his man. "It's always fine on the river, rain 'r shine. Anybody who says it ain't is a God A'mighty liar!"

He was still the old Duggan, ready to fight for his river at the drop of a hat! Keith wanted to hug him. He shifted his pack and said:

"I've slept with it for a week—just to have it for company—on the way down from Cumberland House. Seems good to get back!" He took off his hat and met the riverman's eyes squarely. "Do you happen to know if McDowell is at barracks?" he asked.

"He is," said Duggan.

That was all. He was looking at Keith with a curious directness. Keith held his breath. He would have given a good deal to have seen behind Duggan's beard. There was a hard note in the riverman's voice, too. It puzzled him. And there

was a flash of sullen fire in his eyes at the mention of McDowell's name.

"The Inspector's there—sittin' tight," he added, and to Keith's amazement brushed past him without another word and disappeared into the bush.

This, at least, was not like the good-humored Duggan of four years ago. Keith replaced his hat and went on. At the farther side of the clearing he turned and looked back. Duggan stood in the open roadway, his hands thrust deep in his pockets, staring after him. Keith waved his hand, but Duggan did not respond. He stood like a sphinx, his big red beard glowing in the early sun, and watched Keith until he was gone.

To Keith this first experiment in the matter of testing an identity was a disappointment. It was not only disappointing but filled him with apprehension. It was true that Duggan had not recognized him as John Keith, *but neither had he recognized him as Derwent Conniston!* And Duggan was not a man to forget in three or four years—or half a lifetime, for that matter. He saw himself facing a new

and unexpected situation. What if McDowell, like Duggan, saw in him nothing more than a stranger? The Englishman's last words pounded in his head again like little fists beating home a truth, "You win or lose the moment McDowell first sets his eyes on you." They pressed upon him now with a deadly significance. For the first time he understood all that Conniston had meant. His danger was not alone in the possibility of being recognized as John Keith; it lay also in the hazard of *not* being recognized as Derwent Conniston.

If the thought had come to him to turn back, if the voice of fear and a premonition of impending evil had urged him to seek freedom in another direction, their whispered cautions were futile in the thrill of the greater excitement that possessed him now. That there was a third hand playing in this game of chance in which Conniston had already lost his life, and in which he was now staking his own, was something which gave to Keith a new and entirely unlooked-for desire to see the end of the adventure. The mental vision of his own certain fate, should he lose, dissolved

into a nebulous presence that no longer oppressed nor appalled him. Physical instinct to fight against odds, the inspiration that presages the uncertainty of battle, fired his blood with an exhilarating eagerness. He was anxious to stand face to face with McDowell. Not until then would the real fight begin. For the first time the fact seized upon him that the Englishman was wrong—he would *not* win or lose in the first moment of the Inspector's scrutiny. In that moment he could lose—McDowell's cleverly trained eyes might detect the fraud; but to win, if the game was not lost at the first shot, meant an exciting struggle. Today might be his Armageddon, but it could not possess the hour of his final triumph.

He felt himself now like a warrior held in leash within sound of the enemy's guns and the smell of his powder. He held his old world to be his enemy, for civilization meant people, and the people were the law—and the law wanted his life. Never had he possessed a deeper hatred for the old code of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth than in this hour when he saw up

the valley a gray mist of smoke rising over the roofs of his home town. He had never conceded within himself that he was a criminal. He believed that in killing Kirkstone he had killed a serpent who had deserved to die, and a hundred times he had told himself that the job would have been much more satisfactory from the view-point of human sanitation if he had sent the son in the father's footsteps. He had rid the people of a man not fit to live—and the people wanted to kill him for it. Therefore the men and women in that town he had once loved, and still loved, were his enemies, and to find friends among them again he was compelled to perpetrate a clever fraud.

He remembered an unboarded path from this side of the town, which entered an inconspicuous little street at the end of which was a barber shop. It was the barber shop which he must reach first. He was glad that it was early in the day when he came to the street an hour later, for he would meet few people. The street had changed considerably. Long, open spaces had filled in with houses, and he

wondered if the anticipated boom of four years ago had come. He smiled grimly as the humor of the situation struck him. His father and he had staked their future in accumulating a lot of "outside" property. If the boom had materialized, that property was "inside" now—and worth a great deal. Before he reached the barber shop he realized that the dream of the Prince Albertites had come true. Prosperity had advanced upon them in mighty leaps. The population of the place had trebled. He was a rich man! And also, it occurred to him, he was a dead one—or would be when he reported officially to McDowell. What a merry scrap there would be among the heirs of John Keith, deceased!

The old shop still clung to its corner, which was valuable as "business footage" now. But it possessed a new barber. He was alone. Keith gave his instructions in definite detail and showed him Conniston's photograph in his identification book. The beard and mustache must be just so, very smart, decidedly English, and of military neatness, his hair cut not too short

and brushed smoothly back. When the operation was over, he congratulated the barber and himself. Bronzed to the color of an Indian by wind and smoke, straight as an arrow, his muscles swelling with the brute strength of the wilderness, he smiled at himself in the mirror when he compared the old John Keith with this new Derwent Conniston! Before he went out he tightened his belt a notch. Then he headed straight for the barracks of His Majesty's Royal Northwest Mounted Police.

His way took him up the main street, past the rows of shops that had been there four years ago, past the Saskatchewan Hotel and the little Board of Trade building which, like the old barber shop, still hung to its original perch at the edge of the high bank which ran precipitously down to the river. And there, as sure as fate, was Percival Clary, the little English Secretary! But what a different Percy! He had broadened out and straightened up. He had grown a mustache, which was immaculately waxed. His trousers were immaculately creased, his shoes were shining, and he stood before the door of his

now important office resting lightly on a cane. Keith grinned as he witnessed how prosperity had bolstered up Percival along with the town. His eyes quested for familiar faces as he went along. Here and there he saw one, but for the most part he encountered strangers, lively looking men who were hustling as if they had a mission in hand. Glaring real estate signs greeted him from every place of prominence, and automobiles began to hum up and down the main street that stretched along the river—twenty where there had been one not so long ago.

Keith found himself fighting to keep his eyes straight ahead when he met a girl or a woman. Never had he believed fully and utterly in the angelhood of the feminine until now. He passed perhaps a dozen on the way to barracks, and he was overwhelmed with the desire to stop and feast his eyes upon each one of them. He had never been a lover of women; he admired them, he believed them to be the better part of man, he had worshiped his mother, but his heart had been neither glorified nor broken by a passion for the

opposite sex. Now, to the bottom of his soul, he worshiped that dozen! Some of them were homely, some of them were plain, two or three of them were pretty, but to Keith their present physical qualifications made no difference. They were white women, and they were glorious, every one of them! The plainest of them was lovely. He wanted to throw up his hat and shout in sheer joy. Four years—and now he was back in angel land! For a space he forgot McDowell.

His head was in a whirl when he came to barracks. Life was good, after all. It was worth fighting for, and he was bound to fight. He went straight to McDowell's office. A moment after his knock on the door the Inspector's secretary appeared.

"The Inspector is busy, sir," he said in response to Keith's inquiry. "I'll tell him——"

"That I am here on a very important matter," advised Keith. "He will admit me when you tell him that I bring information regarding a certain John Keith."

The secretary disappeared through an inner door. It seemed not more than ten

seconds before he was back. "The Inspector will see you, sir."

Keith drew a deep breath to quiet the violent beating of his heart. In spite of all his courage he felt upon him the clutch of a cold and foreboding hand, a hand that seemed struggling to drag him back. And again he heard Conniston's dying voice whispering to him, *"Remember, old chap, you win or lose the moment McDowell first sets his eyes on you!"*

Was Conniston right?

Win or lose, he would play the game as the Englishman would have played it. Squaring his shoulders he entered to face McDowell, the cleverest man-hunter in the Northwest.

V

KEITH'S first vision, as he entered the office of the Inspector of Police, was not of McDowell, but of a girl. She sat directly facing him as he advanced through the door, the light from a window throwing into strong relief her face and hair. The effect was unusual. She was strikingly handsome. The sun, giving to the room a soft radiance, lit up her hair with shimmering gold; her eyes, Keith saw, were a clear and wonderful gray—and they stared at him as he entered, while the poise of her body and the tenseness of her face gave evidence of sudden and unusual emotion. These things Keith observed in a flash; then he turned toward McDowell.

The Inspector sat behind a table covered with maps and papers, and instantly Keith was conscious of the penetrating inquisition of his gaze. He felt, for an instant.

the disquieting tremor of the criminal. Then he met McDowell's eyes squarely. They were, as Conniston had warned him, eyes that could see through boiler-plate. Of an indefinable color and deep set behind shaggy, gray eyebrows, they pierced him through at the first glance. Keith took in the carefully waxed gray mustaches, the close-cropped gray hair, the rigidly set muscles of the man's face, and saluted.

He felt creeping over him a slow chill. There was no greeting in that iron-like countenance, for full a quarter-minute no sign of recognition. And then, as the sun had played in the girl's hair, a new emotion passed over McDowell's face, and Keith saw for the first time the man whom Derwent Conniston had known as a friend as well as a superior. He rose from his chair, and leaning over the table said in a voice in which were mingled both amazement and pleasure:

"We were just talking about the devil —and here you are, sir! Conniston, how are you?"

For a few moments Keith did not see.

He had won! The blood pounded through his heart so violently that it confused his vision and his senses. He felt the grip of McDowell's hand; he heard his voice; a vision swam before his eyes—and it was the vision of Derwent Conniston's triumphant face. He was standing erect, his head was up, he was meeting McDowell shoulder to shoulder, even smiling, but in that swift surge of exultation he did not know. McDowell, still gripping his hand and with his other hand on his arm, was wheeling him about, and he found the girl on her feet, staring at him as if he had newly risen from the dead.

McDowell's military voice was snapping vibrantly, "Conniston, meet Miss Miriam Kirkstone, daughter of Judge Kirkstone!"

He bowed and held for a moment in his own the hand of the girl whose father he had killed. It was lifeless and cold. Her lips moved, merely speaking his name. His own were mute. McDowell was saying something about the glory of the service and the sovereignty of the law. And then, breaking in like the beat of a drum on the introduction, his voice demanded,

"Conniston—*did you get your man?*"

The question brought Keith to his senses. He inclined his head slightly and said, "I beg to report that John Keith is dead, sir."

He saw Miriam Kirkstone give a visible start, as if his words had carried a stab. She was apparently making a strong effort to hide her agitation as she turned swiftly away from him, speaking to McDowell.

"You have been very kind, Inspector McDowell. I hope very soon to have the pleasure of talking with Mr. Conniston—about—John Keith."

She left them, nodding slightly to Keith.

When she was gone, a puzzled look filled the Inspector's eyes. "She has been like that for the last six months," he explained. "Tremendously interested in this man Keith and his fate. I don't believe that I have watched for your return more anxiously than she has, Conniston. And the curious part of it is she seemed to have no interest in the matter at all until six months ago. Sometimes I am afraid that brooding over her father's death has unsettled her a little. A mighty pretty

girl, Conniston. A mighty pretty girl, indeed! And her brother is a skunk. Pst! You haven't forgotten him?"

He drew a chair up close to his own and motioned Keith to be seated. "You're changed, Conniston!"

The words came out of him like a shot. So unexpected were they that Keith felt the effect of them in every nerve of his body. He sensed instantly what McDowell meant. He was *not* like the Englishman; he lacked his mannerisms, his cool and superior suavity, the inimitable quality of his nerve and sportsmanship. Even as he met the disquieting directness of the Inspector's eyes, he could see Conniston sitting in his place, rolling his mustache between his forefinger and thumb, and smiling as though he had gone into the north but yesterday and had returned today. That was what McDowell was missing in him, the soul of Conniston himself—Conniston, the *ne plus ultra* of presence and amiable condescension, the man who could look the Inspector or the High Commissioner himself between the eyes, and, serenely indifferent to Service regulations,

say, "Fine morning, old top!" Keith was not without his own sense of humor. How the Englishman's ghost must be raging if it was in the room at the present moment! He grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

"Were you ever up there—through the Long Night—alone?" he asked. "Ever been through six months of living torture with the stars leering at you and the foxes barking at you all the time, fighting to keep yourself from going mad? I went through that twice to get John Keith, and I guess you're right. I'm changed. I don't think I'll ever be the same again. Something—has gone. I can't tell what it is, but I feel it. I guess only half of me pulled through. It killed John Keith. Rotten, isn't it?"

He felt that he had made a lucky stroke. McDowell pulled out a drawer from under the table and thrust a box of fat cigars under his nose.

"Light up, Derry—light up and tell us what happened. Bless my soul, you're not half dead! A week in the old town will straighten you out."

He struck a match and held it to the tip of Keith's cigar.

For an hour thereafter Keith told the story of the man-hunt. It was his Iliad. He could feel the presence of Conniston as words fell from his lips; he forgot the presence of the stern-faced man who was watching him and listening to him; he could see once more only the long months and years of that epic drama of one against one, of pursuit and flight, of hunger and cold, of the Long Nights filled with the desolation of madness and despair. He triumphed over himself, and it was Conniston who spoke from within him. It was the Englishman who told how terribly John Keith had been punished, and when he came to the final days in the lonely little cabin in the edge of the Barrens, Keith finished with a choking in his throat, and the words,

"And that was how John Keith died—a gentleman and a *man!*"

He was thinking of the Englishman, of the calm and fearless smile in his eyes as he died, of his last words, the last friendly grip of his hand, and McDowell saw the

thing as though he had faced it himself. He brushed a hand over his face as if to wipe away a film. For some moments after Keith had finished, he stood with his back to the man who he thought was Conniston, and his mind was swiftly adding twos and twos and fours and fours as he looked away into the green valley of the Saskatchewan. He was the iron man when he turned to Keith again, the law itself, merciless and potent, by some miracle turned into the form of human flesh.

"After two and a half years of *that* even a murderer must have seemed like a saint to you, Conniston. You have done your work splendidly. The whole story shall go to the Department, and if it doesn't bring you a commission, I'll resign. But we must continue to regret that John Keith did not live to be hanged."

"He has paid the price," said Keith dully.

"No, he has not paid the price, not in full. He merely died. It could have been paid only at the end of a rope. His crime was atrociously brutal, the culmination of

a fiend's desire for revenge. We will wipe off his name. But I can not wipe away the regret. I would sacrifice a year of my life if he were in this room with you now. It would be worth it. God, what a thing for the Service—to have brought John Keith back to justice after four years!"

He was rubbing his hands and smiling at Keith even as he spoke. His eyes had taken on a filmy glitter. The law! It stood there, without heart or soul, coveting the life that had escaped it. A feeling of revulsion swept over Keith.

A knock came at the door.

McDowell's voice gave permission, and the door slowly opened. Cruze, the young secretary, thrust in his head.

"Shan Tung is waiting, sir," he said.

An invisible hand reached up suddenly and gripped at Keith's throat. He turned aside to conceal what his face might have betrayed. Shan Tung! He knew what it was now that had pulled him back, he knew why Conniston's troubled face had traveled with him over the Barrens, and there surged over him with a sickening

foreboding, a realization of what it was that Conniston had remembered and wanted to tell him—when it was too late. *They had forgotten Shan Tung, the Chinaman!*

VI

IN the hall beyond the secretary's room Shan Tung waited. As McDowell was the iron and steel embodiment of the law, so Shan Tung was the flesh and blood spirit of the mysticism and immutability of his race. His face was the face of an image made of an unemotional living tissue in place of wood or stone, dispassionate, tolerant, patient. What passed in the brain behind his yellow-tinged eyes only Shan Tung knew. It was his secret. And McDowell had ceased to analyze or attempt to understand him. The law, baffled in its curiosity, had come to accept him as a weird and wonderful mechanism —a thing more than a man—possessed of an unholy power. This power was the oriental's marvelous ability to remember faces. Once Shan Tung looked at a face, it was photographed in his memory for years. Time and change could not make him forget—and the law made use of him.

Briefly McDowell had classified him at Headquarters. "Either an exiled prime minister of China or the devil in a yellow skin," he had written to the Commissioner. "Correct age unknown and past history a mystery. Dropped into Prince Albert in 1908 wearing diamonds and patent leather shoes. A stranger then and a stranger now. Proprietor and owner of the Shan Tung Café. Educated, soft-spoken, womanish, but the one man on earth I'd hate to be in a dark room with, knives drawn. I use him, mistrust him, watch him, and would fear him under certain conditions. As far as we can discover, he is harmless and law-abiding. But such a ferret must surely have played his game somewhere, at some time."

This was the man whom Conniston had forgotten and Keith now dreaded to meet. For many minutes Shan Tung had stood at a window looking out upon the sunlit drill-ground and the broad sweep of green beyond. He was toying with his slim hands caressingly. Half a smile was on his lips. No man had ever seen more than that half smile illuminate Shan Tung's face.

His black hair was sleek and carefully trimmed. His dress was immaculate. His slimness, as McDowell had noted, was the slimness of a young girl.

When Cruze came to announce that McDowell would see him, Shan Tung was still visioning the golden-headed figure of Miriam Kirkstone as he had seen her passing through the sunshine. There was something like a purr in his breath as he stood interlacing his tapering fingers. The instant he heard the secretary's footsteps the finger play stopped, the purr died, the half smile was gone. He turned softly. Cruze did not speak. He simply made a movement of his head, and Shan Tung's feet fell noiselessly. Only the slight sound made by the opening and closing of a door gave evidence of his entrance into the Inspector's room. Shan Tung and no other could open and close a door like that. Cruze shivered. He always shivered when Shan Tung passed him, and always he swore that he could smell something in the air, like a poison left behind.

Keith, facing the window, was waiting. The moment the door was opened, he felt

Shan Tung's presence. Every nerve in his body was keyed to an uncomfortable tension. The thought that his grip on himself was weakening, and because of a Chinaman, maddened him. And he must turn. Not to face Shan Tung now would be but a postponement of the ordeal and a confession of cowardice.

Forcing his hand into Conniston's little trick of twisting a mustache, he turned slowly, leveling his eyes squarely to meet Shan Tung's.

To his surprise Shan Tung seemed utterly oblivious of his presence. He had not, apparently, taken more than a casual glance in his direction. In a voice which one beyond the door might have mistaken for a woman's, he was saying to McDowell:

"I have seen the man you sent me to see, Mr. McDowell. It is Larsen. He has changed much in eight years. He has grown a beard. He has lost an eye. His hair has whitened. But it is Larsen."

The faultlessness of his speech and the unemotional but perfect inflection of his words made Keith, like the young secre-

tary, shiver where he stood. In McDowell's face he saw a flash of exultation.

"He had no suspicion of you, Shan Tung?"

"He did not see me to suspect. He will be there—when——" Slowly he faced Keith. "—When Mr. Conniston goes to arrest him," he finished.

He inclined his head as he backed noiselessly toward the door. His yellow eyes did not leave Keith's face. In them Keith fancied that he caught a sinister gleam. There was the faintest inflection of a new note in his voice, and his fingers were playing again, but not as when he had looked out through the window at Miriam Kirkstone. And then—in a flash, it seemed to Keith—the Chinaman's eyes closed to narrow slits, and the pupils became points of flame no larger than the sharpened ends of a pair of pencils. The last that Keith was conscious of seeing of Shan Tung was the oriental's eyes. They had seemed to drag his soul half out of his body.

"A queer devil," said McDowell. "After he is gone, I always feel as if a snake had been in the room. He still hates

you, Conniston. Three years have made no difference. He hates you like poison. I believe he would kill you, if he had a chance to do it and get away with the business. And you—you blooming idiot—simply twiddle your mustache and laugh at him! I'd feel differently if I were in your boots."

Inwardly Keith was asking himself why it was that Shan Tung had hated Conniston.

McDowell added nothing to enlighten him. He was gathering up a number of papers scattered on his desk, smiling with a grim satisfaction. "It's Larsen all right if Shan Tung says so," he told Keith. And then, as if he had only thought of the matter, he said, "You're going to reënlist, aren't you, Conniston?"

"I still owe the Service a month or so before my term expires, don't I? After that—yes—I believe I shall reënlist."

"Good!" approved the Inspector. "I'll have you a sergeancy within a month. Meanwhile you're off duty and may do anything you please. You know Brady, the Company agent? He's up the Macken-

zie on a trip, and here's the key to his shack. I know you'll appreciate getting under a real roof again, and Brady won't object as long as I collect his thirty dollars a month rent. Of course Barracks is open to you, but it just occurred to me you might prefer this place while on furlough. Everything is there from a bathtub to nutcrackers, and I know a little Jap in town who is hunting a job as a cook. What do you say?"

"Splendid!" cried Keith. "I'll go up at once, and if you'll hustle the Jap along, I'll appreciate it. You might tell him to bring up stuff for dinner," he added.

McDowell gave him a key. Ten minutes later he was out of sight of barracks and climbing a green slope that led to Brady's bungalow.

In spite of the fact that he had not played his part brilliantly, he believed that he had scored a triumph. Andy Duggan had not recognized him, and the riverman had been one of his most intimate friends. McDowell had accepted him apparently without a suspicion. And Shan Tung—

It was Shan Tung who weighed heavily

upon his mind, even as his nerves tingled with the thrill of success. He could not get away from the vision of the Chinaman as he had backed through the Inspector's door, the flaming needle-points of his eyes piercing him as he went. It was not hatred he had seen in Shan Tung's face. He was sure of that. It was no emotion that he could describe. It was as if a pair of mechanical eyes fixed in the head of an amazingly efficient mechanical monster had focused themselves on him in those few instants. It made him think of an X-ray machine. But Shan Tung was human. And he was clever. Given another skin, one would not have taken him for what he was. The immaculateness of his speech and manners was more than unusual; it was positively irritating, something which no Chinaman should rightfully possess. So argued Keith as he went up to Brady's bungalow.

He tried to throw off the oppression of the thing that was creeping over him, the growing suspicion that he had not passed safely under the battery of Shan Tung's eyes. With physical things he endeavored

to thrust his mental uneasiness into the background. He lighted one of the half-dozen cigars McDowell had dropped into his pocket. It was good to feel a cigar between his teeth again and taste its flavor. At the crest of the slope on which Brady's bungalow stood, he stopped and looked about him. Instinctively his eyes turned first to the west. In that direction half of the town lay under him, and beyond its edge swept the timbered slopes, the river, and the green pathways of the plains. His heart beat a little faster as he looked. Half a mile away was a tiny, parklike patch of timber, and sheltered there, with the river running under it, was the old home. The building was hidden, but through a break in the trees he could see the top of the old red brick chimney glowing in the sun, as if beckoning a welcome to him over the tree tops. He forgot Shan Tung; he forgot McDowell; he forgot that he was John Keith, the murderer, in the overwhelming sea of loneliness that swept over him. He looked out into the world that had once been his, and all that he saw was that red brick

chimney glowing in the sun, and the chimney changed until at last it seemed to him like a tombstone rising over the graves of the dead. He turned to the door of the bungalow with a thickening in his throat and his eyes filmed by a mist through which for a few moments it was difficult for him to see.

The bungalow was darkened by drawn curtains when he entered. One after another he let them up, and the sun poured in. Brady had left his place in order, and Keith felt about him an atmosphere of cheer that was a mighty urge to his flagging spirits. Brady was a home man without a wife. The Company's agent had called his place "The Shack" because it was built entirely of logs, and a woman could not have made it more comfortable. Keith stood in the big living-room. At one end was a strong fireplace in which kindlings and birch were already laid, waiting the touch of a match. Brady's reading table and his easy chair were drawn up close; his lounging moccasins were on a footstool; pipes, tobacco, books and magazines littered the table; and out

of this cheering disorder rose triumphantly the amber shoulder of a half-filled bottle of Old Rye.

Keith found himself chuckling. His grin met the lifeless stare of a pair of glass eyes in the huge head of an old bull moose over the mantel, and after that his gaze rambled over the walls ornamented with mounted heads, pictures, snowshoes, gun-racks and the things which went to make up the comradeship and business of Brady's picturesque life. Keith could look through into the little dining-room, and beyond that was the kitchen. He made an inventory of both and found that McDowell was right. There were nutcrackers in Brady's establishment. And he found the bathroom. It was not much larger than a piano box, but the tub was man's size, and Keith raised a window and poked his head out to find that it was connected with a rainwater tank built by a genius, just high enough to give weight sufficient for a water system and low enough to gather the rain as it fell from the eaves. He laughed outright, the sort of laugh that comes out of a man's soul not when

he is amused but when he is pleased. By the time he had investigated the two bedrooms, he felt a real affection for Brady. He selected the agent's room for his own. Here, too, were pipes and tobacco and books and magazines, and a reading lamp on a table close to the bedside. Not until he had made a closer inspection of the living-room did he discover that the Shack also had a telephone.

By that time he noted that the sun had gone out. Driving up from the west was a mass of storm clouds. He unlocked a door from which he could look up the river, and the wind that was riding softly in advance of the storm ruffled his hair and cooled his face. In it he caught again the old fancy—the smells of the vast reaches of unpeopled prairie beyond the rim of the forest, and the luring chill of the distant mountain tops. Always storm that came down with the river brought to him voice from the river's end. It came to him from the great mountains that were a passion with him; it seemed to thunder to him the old stories of the mightiest fastnesses of the Rockies and stirred in him

the child-bred yearning to follow up his beloved river until he came at last to the mystery of its birthplace in the cradle of the western ranges. And now, as he faced the storm, the grip of that desire held him like a strong hand.

The sky blackened swiftly, and with the rumbling of far-away thunder he saw the lightning slitting the dark heaven like bayonets, and the fire of the electrical charges galloped to him and filled his veins. His heart all at once cried out words that his lips did not utter. Why should he not answer the call that had come to him through all the years? Now was the time—and why should he not go? Why tempt fate in the hazard of a great adventure where home and friends and even hope were dead to him, when off there beyond the storm was the place of his dreams? He threw out his arms. His voice broke at last in a cry of strange ecstasy. Not everything was gone! Not everything was dead! Over the graveyard of his past there was sweeping a mighty force that called him, something that was no longer merely an urge and a demand

but a thing that was irresistible. He would go! Tomorrow—today—tonight—he would begin making plans!

He watched the deluge as it came on with a roar of wind, a beating, hissing wall under which the tree tops down in the edge of the plain bent their heads like a multitude of people in prayer. He saw it sweeping up the slope in a mass of gray dragoons. It caught him before he had closed the door, and his face dripped with wet as he forced the last inch of it against the wind with his shoulder. It was the sort of storm Keith liked. The thunder was the rumble of a million giant cart-wheels rolling overhead.

Inside the bungalow it was growing dark as though evening had come. He dropped on his knees before the pile of dry fuel in the fireplace and struck a match. For a space the blaze smoldered; then the birch fired up like oil-soaked tinder, and a yellow flame crackled and roared up the flue. Keith was sensitive in the matter of smoking other people's pipes, so he drew out his own and filled it with Brady's tobacco. It was an English mix-

ture, rich and aromatic, and as the fire burned brighter and the scent of the tobacco filled the room, he dropped into Brady's big lounging chair and stretched out his legs with a deep breath of satisfaction. His thoughts wandered to the clash of the storm. He would have a place like this off there in the mystery of the trackless mountains, where the Saskatchewan was born. He would build it like Brady's place, even to the rain-water tank midway between the roof and the ground. And after a few years no one would remember that a man named John Keith had ever lived.

Something brought him suddenly to his feet. It was the ringing of the telephone. After four years the sound was one that roused with an uncomfortable jump every nerve in his body. Probably it was McDowell calling up about the Jap or to ask how he liked the place. Probably—it was that. He repeated the thought aloud as he laid his pipe on the table. And yet as his hand came in contact with the telephone, he felt an inclination to draw back. A subtle voice whispered him

not to answer, to leave while the storm was dark, to go back into the wilderness, to fight his way to the western mountains.

With a jerk he unhooked the receiver and put it to his ear.

It was not McDowell who answered him. It was not Shan Tung. To his amazement, coming to him through the tumult of the storm, he recognized the voice of Miriam Kirkstone!

VII

WHY should Miriam Kirkstone call him up in an hour when the sky was livid with the flash of lightning and the earth trembled with the roll of thunder? This was the question that filled Keith's mind as he listened to the voice at the other end of the wire. It was pitched to a high treble as if unconsciously the speaker feared that the storm might break in upon her words. She was telling him that she had telephoned McDowell but had been too late to catch him before he left for Brady's bungalow; she was asking him to pardon her for intruding upon his time so soon after his return, but she was sure that he would understand her. She wanted him to come up to see her that evening at eight o'clock. It was important—to her. Would he come?

Before Keith had taken a moment to consult with himself he had replied that

he would. He heard her "thank you," her "good-by," and hung up the receiver, stunned. So far as he could remember, he had spoken no more than seven words. The beautiful young woman up at the Kirkstone mansion had clearly betrayed her fear of the lightning by winding up her business with him at the earliest possible moment. Why, then, had she not waited until the storm was over?

A pounding at the door interrupted his thought. He went to it and admitted an individual who, in spite of his water-soaked condition, was smiling all over. It was Wallie, the Jap. He was no larger than a boy of sixteen, and from eyes, ears, nose, and hair he was dripping streams, while his coat bulged with packages which he had struggled to protect from the torrent through which he had forced his way up the hill. Keith liked him on the instant. He found himself powerless to resist the infection of Wallie's grin, and as Wallie hustled into the kitchen like a wet spaniel, he followed and helped him unload. By the time the little Jap had disgorged his last package, he had assured

Keith that the rain was nice, that his name was Wallie, that he expected five dollars a week and could cook "like heaven." Keith laughed outright, and Wallie was so delighted with the general outlook that he fairly kicked his heels together. Thereafter for an hour or so he was left alone in possession of the kitchen, and shortly Keith began to hear certain sounds and catch occasional odoriferous whiffs which assured him that Wallie was losing no time in demonstrating his divine efficiency in the matter of cooking.

Wallie's coming gave him an excuse to call up McDowell. He confessed to a disquieting desire to hear the inspector's voice again. In the back of his head was the fear of Shan Tung, and the hope that McDowell might throw some light on Miriam Kirkstone's unusual request to see her that night. The storm had settled down into a steady drizzle when he got in touch with him, and he was relieved to find there was no change in the friendliness of the voice that came over the telephone. If Shan Tung had a suspicion, he had kept it to himself.

To Keith's surprise it was McDowell who spoke first of Miss Kirkstone.

"She seemed unusually anxious to get in touch with you," he said. "I am frankly disturbed over a certain matter, Conniston, and I should like to talk with you before you go up tonight."

Keith sniffed the air. "Wallie is going to ring the dinner bell within half an hour. Why not slip on a raincoat and join me up here? I think it's going to be pretty good."

"I'll come," said McDowell. "Expect me any moment."

Fifteen minutes later Keith was helping him off with his wet slicker. He had expected McDowell to make some observation on the cheerfulness of the birch fire and the agreeable aromas that were leaking from Wallie's kitchen, but the inspector disappointed him. He stood for a few moments with his back to the fire, thumbing down the tobacco in his pipe, and he made no effort to conceal the fact that there was something in his mind more important than dinner and the cheer of a grate.

His eyes fell on the telephone, and he nodded toward it. "Seemed very anxious to see you, didn't she, Conniston? I mean Miss Kirkstone."

"Rather."

McDowell seated himself and lighted a match. "Seemed—a little—nervous—perhaps," he suggested between puffs. "As though something had happened—or was going to happen. Don't mind my questioning you, do you, Derry?"

"Not a bit," said Keith. "You see, I thought perhaps you might explain——"

There was a disquieting gleam in McDowell's eyes. "It was odd that she should call you up so soon—and in the storm—wasn't it? She expected to find you at my office. I could fairly hear the lightning hissing along the wires. She must have been under some unusual impulse."

"Perhaps."

McDowell was silent for a space, looking steadily at Keith, as if measuring him up to something.

"I don't mind telling you that I am very deeply interested in Miss Kirkstone," he

said. "You didn't see her when the Judge was killed. She was away at school, and you were on John Keith's trail when she returned. I have never been much of a woman's man, Conniston, but I tell you frankly that up until six or eight months ago Miriam was one of the most beautiful girls I have ever seen. I would give a good deal to know the exact hour and date when the change in her began. I might be able to trace some event to that date. It was six months ago that she began to take an interest in the fate of John Keith. Since then the change in her has alarmed me, Conniston. I don't understand. She has betrayed nothing. But I have seen her dying by inches under my eyes. She is only a pale and drooping flower compared with what she was. I am positive it is not a sickness—unless it is mental. I have a suspicion. It is almost too terrible to put into words. You will be going up there tonight—you will be alone with her, will talk with her, may learn a great deal if you understand what it is that is eating like a canker in my mind. Will you help me to discover her secret?"

He leaned toward Keith. He was no longer the man of iron. There was something intensely human in his face.

"There is no other man on earth I would confide this matter to," he went on slowly. "It will take—a gentleman—to handle it, someone who is big enough to forget if my suspicion is untrue, and who will understand fully what sacrilege means should it prove true. It is extremely delicate. I hesitate. And yet—I am waiting, Conniston. Is it necessary to ask you to pledge secrecy in the matter?"

Keith held out a hand. McDowell gripped it tight.

"It is—Shan Tung," he said, a peculiar hiss in his voice. "Shan Tung—and Miriam Kirkstone! Do you understand, Conniston? Does the horror of it get hold of you? Can you make yourself believe that it is possible? Am I mad to allow such a suspicion to creep into my brain? Shan Tung—Miriam Kirkstone! And she sees herself standing now at the very edge of the pit of hell, and it is killing her."

Keith felt his blood running cold as he

saw in the inspector's face the thing which he did not put more plainly in word. He was shocked. He drew his hand from McDowell's grip almost fiercely.

"Impossible!" he cried. "Yes, you are mad. Such a thing would be inconceivable!"

"And yet I have told myself that it is possible," said McDowell. His face was returning into its iron-like mask. His two hands gripped the arms of his chair, and he stared at Keith again as if he were looking through him at something else, and to that something else he seemed to speak, slowly, weighing and measuring each word before it passed his lips.

"I am not superstitious. It has always been a law with me to have conviction forced upon me. I do not believe unusual things until investigation proves them. I am making an exception in the case of Shan Tung. I have never regarded him as a man, like you and me, but as a sort of superphysical human machine possessed of a certain psychological power that is at times almost deadly. Do you begin to understand me? I believe that he has

exerted the whole force of that influence upon Miriam Kirkstone—and she has surrendered to it. I believe—and yet I am not positive."

"And you have watched them for six months?"

"No. The suspicion came less than a month ago. No one that I know has ever had the opportunity of looking into Shan Tung's private life. The quarters behind his café are a mystery. I suppose they can be entered from the café and also from a little stairway at the rear. One night—very late—I saw Miriam Kirkstone come down that stairway. Twice in the last month she has visited Shan Tung at a late hour. Twice that I know of, you understand. And that is not all—quite."

Keith saw the distended veins in McDowell's clenched hands, and he knew that he was speaking under a tremendous strain.

"I watched the Kirkstone home—personally. Three times in that same month Shan Tung visited her there. The third time I entered boldly with a fraud message for the girl. I remained with her for an hour. In that time I saw nothing and

heard nothing of Shan Tung. He was hiding—or got out as I came in."

Keith was visioning Miriam Kirkstone as he had seen her in the inspector's office. He recalled vividly the slim, golden beauty of her, the wonderful gray of her eyes, and the shimmer of her hair as she stood in the light of the window—and then he saw Shan Tung, effeminate, with his sly, creeping hands and his narrowed eyes, and the thing which McDowell had suggested rose up before him a monstrous impossibility.

"Why don't you demand an explanation of Miss Kirkstone?" he asked.

"I have, and she denies it all absolutely, except that Shan Tung came to her house once to see her brother. She says that she was never on the little stairway back of Shan Tung's place."

"And you do not believe her?"

"Assuredly not. I saw her. To speak the cold truth, Conniston, she is lying magnificently to cover up something which she does not want any other person on earth to know."

Keith leaned forward suddenly. "And why is it that John Keith, dead and buried,

should have anything to do with this?" he demanded. "Why did this 'intense interest' you speak of in John Keith begin at about the same time your suspicions began to include Shan Tung?"

McDowell shook his head. "It may be that her interest was not so much in John Keith as in you, Conniston. That is for you to discover—tonight. It is an interesting situation. It has tragic possibilities. The instant you substantiate my suspicions we'll deal directly with Shan Tung. Just now—there's Wallie behind you grinning like a Cheshire cat. His dinner must be a success."

The diminutive Jap had noiselessly opened the door of the little dining-room in which the table was set for two.

Keith smiled as he sat down opposite the man who would have sent him to the executioner had he known the truth. After all, it was but a step from comedy to tragedy. And just now he was conscious of a bit of grisly humor in the situation.

VIII

THE storm had settled into a steady drizzle when McDowell left the Shack at two o'clock. Keith watched the iron man, as his tall, gray figure faded away into the mist down the slope, with a curious undercurrent of emotion. Before the inspector had come up as his guest he had, he thought, definitely decided his future action. He would go west on his furlough, write McDowell that he had decided not to reënlist, and bury himself in the British Columbia mountains before an answer could get back to him, leaving the impression that he was going on to Australia or Japan. He was not so sure of himself now. He found himself looking ahead to the night, when he would see Miriam Kirkstone, and he no longer feared Shan Tung as he had feared him a few hours before. McDowell himself had given him new weapons. He was unofficially on Shan Tung's trail. McDowell

had frankly placed the affair of Miriam Kirkstone in his hands. That it all had in some mysterious way something to do with himself—John Keith—urged him on to the adventure.

He waited impatiently for the evening. Wallie, smothered in a great raincoat, he sent forth on a general foraging expedition and to bring up some of Conniston's clothes. It was a quarter of eight when he left for Miriam Kirkstone's home.

Even at that early hour the night lay about him heavy and dark and saturated with a heavy mist. From the summit of the hill he could no longer make out the valley of the Saskatchewan. He walked down into a pit in which the scattered lights of the town burned dully like distant stars. It was a little after eight when he came to the Kirkstone house. It was set well back in an iron-fenced area thick with trees and shrubbery, and he saw that the porch light was burning to show him the way. Curtains were drawn, but a glow of warm light lay behind them.

He was sure that Miriam Kirkstone must have heard the crunch of his feet on

the gravel walk, for he had scarcely touched the old-fashioned knocker on the door when the door itself was opened. It was Miriam who greeted him. Again he held her hand for a moment in his own.

It was not cold, as it had been in McDowell's office. It was almost feverishly hot, and the pupils of the girl's eyes were big, and dark, and filled with a luminous fire. Keith might have thought that coming in out of the dark night he had startled her. But it was not that. She was repressing something that had preceded him. He thought that he heard the almost noiseless closing of a door at the end of the long hall, and his nostrils caught the faint aroma of a strange perfume. Between him and the light hung a filmy veil of smoke. He knew that it had come from a cigarette. There was an uneasy note in Miss Kirkstone's voice as she invited him to hang his coat and hat on an old-fashioned rack near the door. He took his time, trying to recall where he had detected that perfume before. He remembered, with a sort of shock. It was after Shan Tung had left McDowell's office.

She was smiling when he turned, and apologizing again for making her unusual request that day.

"It was—quite unconventional. But I felt that you would understand, Mr. Conniston. I guess I didn't stop to think. And I am afraid of lightning, too. But I wanted to see you. I didn't want to wait until tomorrow to hear about what happened up there. Is it—so strange?"

Afterward he could not remember just what sort of answer he made. She turned, and he followed her through the big, square-cut door leading out of the hall. It was the same door with the great, sliding panel he had locked on that fateful night, years ago, when he had fought with her father and brother. In it, for a moment, her slim figure was profiled in a frame of vivid light. Her mother must have been beautiful. That was the thought that flashed upon him as the room and its tragic memory lay before him. Everything came back to him vividly, and he was astonished at the few changes in it. There was the big chair with its leather arms, in which the overfatted creature who

Ah Gwah Ching
Minnesota State Sanatorium

had been her father was sitting when he came in. It was the same table, too, and it seemed to him that the same odds and ends were on the mantel over the cobblestone fireplace. And there was somebody's picture of the Madonna still hanging between two windows. The Madonna, like the master of the house, had been too fat to be beautiful. The son, an ogreish pattern of his father, had stood with his back to the Madonna, whose overfat arms had seemed to rest on his shoulders. He remembered that.

The girl was watching him closely when he turned toward her. He had frankly looked the room over, without concealing his intention. She was breathing a little unsteadily, and her hair was shimmering gloriously in the light of an overhead chandelier. She sat down with that light over her, motioning him to be seated opposite her—across the same table from which he had snatched the copper weight that had killed Kirkstone. He had never seen anything quite so steady, quite so beautiful as her eyes when they looked across at him. He thought of McDowell's

suspicion and of Shan Tung and gripped himself hard. The same strange perfume hung subtly on the air he was breathing. On a small silver tray at his elbow lay the ends of three freshly burned cigarettes.

"Of course you remember this room?"

He nodded. "Yes. It was night when I came, like this. The next day I went after John Keith."

She leaned toward him, her hands clasped in front of her on the table. "You will tell me the truth about John Keith?" she asked in a low, tense voice. "You swear that it will be the truth?"

"I will keep nothing back from you that I have told Inspector McDowell," he answered, fighting to meet her eyes steadily. "I almost believe I may tell you more."

"Then—did you speak the truth when you reported to Inspector McDowell? *Is John Keith dead?*"

Could Shan Tung meet those wonderful eyes as he was meeting them now, he wondered? Could he face them and master them, as McDowell had hinted? To McDowell the lie had come easily to his

tongue. It stuck in his throat now. Without giving him time to prepare himself the girl had shot straight for the bull's-eye, straight to the heart of the thing that meant life or death to him, and for a moment he found no answer. Clearly he was facing suspicion. She could not have driven the shaft intuitively. The unexpectedness of the thing astonished him and then thrilled him, and in the thrill of it he found himself more than ever master of himself.

"Would you like to hear how utterly John Keith is dead and how he died?" he asked.

"Yes. That is what I must know."

He noticed that her hands had closed. Her slender fingers were clenched tight.

"I hesitate, because I have almost promised to tell you even more than I told McDowell," he went on. "And that will not be pleasant for you to hear. He killed your father. There can be no sympathy in your heart for John Keith. It will not be pleasant for you to hear that I liked the man, and that I am sorry he is dead."

"Go on—please."

Her hands unclasped. Her fingers lay limp. Something faded slowly out of her face. It was as if she had hoped for something, and that hope was dying. Could it be possible that she had hoped he would say that John Keith was alive?

"Did you know this man?" he asked. "This John Keith?"

She shook her head. "No. I was away at school for many years. I don't remember him."

"But he knew you—that is, he had seen you," said Keith. "He used to talk to me about you in those days when he was helpless and dying. He said that he was sorry for you, and that only because of you did he ever regret the justice he brought upon your father. You see I speak his words. He called it justice. He never weakened on that point. You have probably never heard his part of the story."

"No."

The one word forced itself from her lips. She was expecting him to go on, and waited, her eyes never for an instant leaving his face.

He did not repeat the story exactly as he had told it to McDowell. The facts were the same, but the living fire of his own sympathy and his own conviction were in them now. He told it purely from Keith's point of view, and Miriam Kirkstone's face grew whiter, and her hands grew tense again, as she listened for the first time to Keith's own version of the tragedy of the room in which they were sitting. And then he followed Keith up into that land of ice and snow and gibbering Eskimos, and from that moment he was no longer Keith but spoke with the lips of Conniston. He described the sunless weeks and months of madness until the girl's eyes seemed to catch fire, and when at last he came to the little cabin in which Conniston had died, he was again John Keith. He could not have talked about himself as he did about the Englishman. And when he came to the point where he buried Conniston under the floor, a dry, broken sob broke in upon him from across the table. But there were no tears in the girl's eyes. Tears, perhaps, would have hidden from him the desolation he

saw there. But she did not give in. Her white throat twitched. She tried to draw her breath steadily. And then she said:

"And that—was John Keith!"

He bowed his head in confirmation of the lie, and, thinking of Conniston, he said: "He was the finest gentleman I ever knew. And I am sorry he is dead."

"And I, too, am sorry."

She was reaching a hand across the table to him, slowly, hesitatingly. He stared at her.

"You mean that?"

"Yes, I am sorry."

He took her hand. For a moment her fingers tightened about his own. Then they relaxed and drew gently away from him. In that moment he saw a sudden change come into her face. She was looking beyond him, over his right shoulder. Her eyes widened, her pupils dilated under his gaze, and she held her breath. With the swift caution of the man-hunted he turned. The room was empty behind him. There was nothing but a window at his back. The rain was drizzling against it, and he noticed that the curtain was not

drawn, as they were drawn at the other windows. Even as he looked, the girl went to it and pulled down the shade. He knew that she had seen something, something that had startled her for a moment, but he did not question her. Instead, as if he had noticed nothing, he asked if he might light a cigar.

"I see someone smokes," he excused himself, nodding at the cigarette butts.

He was watching her closely and would have recalled the words in the next breath. He had caught her. Her brother was out of town. And there was a distinctly un-American perfume in the smoke that someone had left in the room. He saw the bit of red creeping up her throat into her cheeks, and his conscience shamed him. It was difficult for him not to believe McDowell now. Shan Tung had been there. It was Shan Tung who had left the hall as he entered. Probably it was Shan Tung whose face she had seen at the window.

What she said amazed him. "Yes, it is a shocking habit of mine, Mr. Conniston. I learned to smoke in the East. Is it so very bad, do you think?"

He fairly shook himself. He wanted to say, "You beautiful little liar, I'd like to call your bluff right now, but I won't, because I'm sorry for you!" Instead, he nipped off the end of his cigar, and said:

"In England, you know, the ladies smoke a great deal. Personally I may be a little prejudiced. I don't know that it is sinful, especially when one uses such good judgment—in orientals." And then he was powerless to hold himself back. He smiled at her frankly, unafraid. "I don't believe you smoke," he added.

He rose to his feet, still smiling across at her, like a big brother waiting for her confidence. She was not alarmed at the directness with which he had guessed the truth. She was no longer embarrassed. She seemed for a moment to be looking through him and into him, a strange and yearning desire glowing dully in her eyes. He saw her throat twitching again, and he was filled with an infinite compassion for this daughter of the man he had killed. But he kept it within himself. He had gone far enough. It was for her to speak. At the door she gave him her hand again,

bidding him good-night. She looked pathetically helpless, and he thought that someone ought to be there with the right to take her in his arms and comfort her.

"You will come again?" she whispered.

"Yes, I am coming again," he said. "Good-night."

He passed out into the drizzle. The door closed behind him, but not before there came to him once more that choking sob from the throat of Miriam Kirkstone.

IX

KEITH'S hand was on the butt of his revolver as he made his way through the black night. He could not see the gravel path under his feet but could only feel it. Something that was more than a guess made him feel that Shan Tung was not far away, and he wondered if it was a premonition, and what it meant. With the keen instinct of a hound he was scenting for a personal danger. He passed through the gate and began the downward slope toward town, and not until then did he begin adding things together and analyzing the situation as it had transformed itself since he had stood in the door of the Shack, welcoming the storm from the western mountains. He thought that he had definitely made up his mind then; now it was chaotic. He could not leave Prince Albert immediately, as the inspiration had moved him a few hours before. Mcdowell had practically given him an as-

signment. And Miss Kirkstone was holding him. Also Shan Tung. He felt within himself the sensation of one who was traveling on very thin ice, yet he could not tell just where or why it was thin.

"Just a fool hunch," he assured himself. "Why the deuce should I let a confounded Chinaman and a pretty girl get on my nerves at this stage of the game? If it wasn't for McDowell——"

And there he stopped. He had fought too long at the raw edge of things to allow himself to be persuaded by delusions, and he confessed that it was John Keith who was holding him, that in some inexplicable way John Keith, though officially dead and buried, was mixed up in a mysterious affair in which Miriam Kirkstone and Shan Tung were the moving factors. And inasmuch as he was now Derwent Conniston and no longer John Keith, he took the logical point of arguing that the affair was none of his business, and that he could go on to the mountains if he pleased. Only in that direction could he see ice of a sane and perfect thickness, to carry out the

metaphor in his head. He could report indifferently to McDowell, forget Miss Kirkstone, and disappear from the menace of Shan Tung's eyes. John Keith, he repeated, would be officially dead, and being dead, the law would have no further interest in him.

He prodded himself on with this thought as he fumbled his way through darkness down into town. Miriam Kirkstone in her golden way was alluring; the mystery that shadowed the big house on the hill was fascinating to his hunting instincts; he had the desire, growing fast, to come at grips with Shan Tung. But he had not foreseen these things, and neither had Conniston foreseen them. They had planned only for the salvation of John Keith's precious neck, and tonight he had almost forgotten the existence of that unpleasant reality, the hangman. Truth settled upon him with depressing effect, and an infinite loneliness turned his mind again to the mountains of his dreams.

The town was empty of life. Lights glowed here and there through the mist; now and then a door opened; down near

the river a dog howled forlornly. Everything was shut against him. There were no longer homes where he might call and be greeted with a cheery "Good evening, Keith. Glad to see you. Come in out of the wet." He could not even go to Duggan, his old river friend. He realized now that his old friends were the very ones he must avoid most carefully to escape self-betrayal. Friendship no longer existed for him; the town was a desert without an oasis where he might reclaim some of the things he had lost. Memories he had treasured gave place to bitter ones. His own townfolk, of all people, were his readiest enemies, and his loneliness clutched him tighter, until the air itself seemed thick and difficult to breathe. For the time Derwent Conniston was utterly submerged in the overwhelming yearnings of John Keith.

He dropped into a dimly lighted shop to purchase a box of cigars. It was deserted except for the proprietor. His elbow bumped into a telephone. He would call up Wallie and tell him to have a good fire waiting for him, and in

the company of that fire he would do a lot of thinking before getting into communication with McDowell.

It was not Wallie who answered him, and he was about to apologize for getting the wrong number when the voice at the other end asked,

"Is that you, Conniston?"

It was McDowell. The discovery gave him a distinct shock. What could the Inspector be doing up at the Shack in his absence? Besides, there was an imperative demand in the question that shot at him over the wire. McDowell had half shouted it.

"Yes, it's I," he said rather feebly. "I'm down-town, stocking up on some cigars. What's the excitement?"

"Don't ask questions but hustle up here," McDowell fired back. "I've got the surprise of your life waiting for you!"

Keith heard the receiver at the other end go up with a bang. Something had happened at the Shack, and McDowell was excited. He went out puzzled. For some reason he was in no great hurry to reach the top of the hill. He was beginning to

expect things to happen—too many things —and in the stress of the moment he felt the incongruity of the friendly box of cigars tucked under his arm. The hardest luck he had ever run up against had never quite killed his sense of humor, and he chuckled. His fortunes were indeed at a low ebb when he found a bit of comfort in hugging a box of cigars still closer.

He could see that every room in the Shack was lighted, when he came to the crest of the slope, but the shades were drawn. He wondered if Wallie had pulled down the curtains, or if it was a caution on McDowell's part against possible espionage. Suspicion made him transfer the box of cigars to his left arm so that his right was free. Somewhere in the darkness Conniston's voice was urging him, as it had urged him up in the cabin on the Barren: "Don't walk into a noose. If it comes to a fight, *fight!*"

And then something happened that brought his heart to a dead stop. He was close to the door. His ear was against it. And he was listening to a voice. It was not Wallie's, and it was not the iron

man's. It was a woman's voice, or a girl's.

He opened the door and entered, taking swiftly the two or three steps that carried him across the tiny vestibule to the big room. His entrance was so sudden that the tableau in front of him was unbroken for a moment. Birch logs were blazing in the fireplace. In the big chair sat McDowell, partly turned, a smoking cigar poised in his fingers, staring at him. Seated on a footstool, with her chin in the cup of her hands, was a girl. At first, blinded a little by the light, Keith thought she was a child, a remarkably pretty child with wide-open, half-startled eyes and a wonderful crown of glowing, brown hair in which he could still see the shimmer of wet. He took off his hat and brushed the water from his eyes. McDowell did not move. Slowly the girl rose to her feet. It was then that Keith saw she was not a child. Perhaps she was eighteen, a slim, tired-looking, little thing, wonderfully pretty, and either on the verge of laughing or crying. Perhaps it was halfway between. To his growing discomfiture she

came slowly toward him with a strange and wonderful look in her face. And McDowell still sat there staring.

His heart thumped with an emotion he had no time to question. In those wide-open, shining eyes of the girl he sensed unspeakable tragedy—for him. And then the girl's arms were reaching out to him, and she was crying in that voice that trembled and broke between sobs and laughter:

"Derry, don't you know me? Don't you know me?"

He stood like one upon whom had fallen the curse of the dumb. She was within arm's reach of him, her face white as a cameo, her eyes glowing like newly-fired stars, her slim throat quivering, and her arms reaching toward him.

"Derry, don't you know me? *Don't you know me?*"

It was a sob, a cry. McDowell had risen. Overwhelmingly there swept upon Keith an impulse that rocked him to the depth of his soul. He opened his arms, and in an instant the girl was in them. Quivering, and sobbing, and laughing she

was on his breast. He felt the crush of her soft hair against his face, her arms were about his neck, and she was pulling his head down and kissing him—not once or twice, but again and again, passionately and without shame. His own arms tightened. He heard McDowell's voice—a distant and non-essential voice it seemed to him now—saying that he would leave them alone and that he would see them again tomorrow. He heard the door open and close. McDowell was gone. And the soft little arms were still tight about his neck. The sweet crush of hair smothered his face, and on his breast she was crying now like a baby. He held her closer. A wild exultation seized upon him, and every fiber in his body responded to its thrill, as tautly-stretched wires respond to an electrical storm. It passed swiftly, burning itself out, and his heart was left dead. He heard a sound made by Wallie out in the kitchen. He saw the walls of the room again, the chair in which McDowell had sat, the blazing fire. His arms relaxed. The girl raised her head and put her two hands to his face, looking at him

with eyes which Keith no longer failed to recognize. They were the eyes that had looked at him out of the faded picture in Conniston's watch.

"Kiss me, Derry!"

It was impossible not to obey. Her lips clung to him. There was love, adoration, in their caress.

And then she was crying again, with her arms around him tight and her face hidden against him, and he picked her up as he would have lifted a child, and carried her to the big chair in front of the fire. He put her in it and stood before her, trying to smile. Her hair had loosened, and the shining mass of it had fallen about her face and to her shoulders. She was more than ever like a little girl as she looked up at him, her eyes worshiping him, her lips trying to smile, and one little hand dabbing her eyes with a tiny handkerchief that was already wet and crushed.

"You—you don't seem very glad to see me, Derry."

"I—I'm just stunned," he managed to say. "You see——"

"It *is* a shocking surprise, Derry. I

meant it to be. I've been planning it for years and years and *years!* Please take off your coat—it's dripping wet!—and sit down near me, on that stool!"

Again he obeyed. He was big for the stool.

"You are glad to see me, aren't you, Derry?"

She was leaning over the edge of the big chair, and one of her hands went to his damp hair, brushing it back. It was a wonderful touch. He had never felt anything like it before in his life, and involuntarily he bent his head a little. In a moment she had hugged it up close to her.

"You *are* glad, aren't you, Derry? Say 'yes.'"

"Yes," he whispered.

He could feel the swift, excited beating of her heart.

"And I'm never going back again—to *them,*" he heard her say, something suddenly low and fierce in her voice. "*Never!* I'm going to stay with you always, Derry. Always!"

She put her lips close to his ear and whispered mysteriously. "They don't

know where I am. Maybe they think I'm dead. But Colonel Reppington knows. I told him I was coming if I had to walk round the world to get here. He said he'd keep my secret, and gave me letters to some awfully nice people over here. I've been over six months. And when I saw your name in one of those dry-looking, blue-covered, paper books the Mounted Police get out, I just dropped down on my knees and thanked the good Lord, Derry. I knew I'd find you somewhere—sometime. I haven't slept two winks since leaving Montreal! And I guess I really frightened that big man with the terrible mustaches, for when I rushed in on him tonight, dripping wet, and said, 'I'm Miss Mary Josephine Conniston, and I want my brother,' his eyes grew bigger and bigger until I thought they were surely going to pop out at me. And then he swore. He said, 'My Gawd, I didn't know he had a sister!'"

Keith's heart was choking him. So this wonderful little creature was Derwent Conniston's sister! And she was claiming *him*. She thought he was her brother!

"—And I love him because he treated me so nicely," she was saying. "He really hugged me, Derry. I guess he didn't think I was away past eighteen. And he wrapped me up in a big oilskin, and we came up here. And—O Derry, Derry—why did you do it? Why didn't you let me know? Don't you—want me here?"

He heard, but his mind had swept beyond her to the little cabin in the edge of the Great Barren where Derwent Conniston lay dead. He heard the wind moaning, as it had moaned that night the Englishman died, and he saw again that last and unspoken yearning in Conniston's eyes. And he knew now why Conniston's face had followed him through the gray gloom and why he had felt the mysterious presence of him long after he had gone. Something that was Conniston entered into him now. In the throbbing chaos of his brain a voice was whispering, "She is yours, she is yours."

His arms tightened about her, and a voice that was not unlike John Keith's voice said: "Yes, I want you! I want you!"

X

FOR a space Keith did not raise his head. The girl's arms were about him close, and he could feel the warm pressure of her cheek against his hair. The realization of his crime was already weighing his soul like a piece of lead, yet out of that soul had come the cry, "I want you—I want you!" and it still beat with the voice of that immeasurable yearning even as his lips grew tight and he saw himself the monstrous fraud he was. This strange little, wonderful creature had come to him from out of a dead world, and her lips, and her arms, and the soft caress of her hands had sent his own world reeling about his head so swiftly that he had been drawn into a maelstrom to which he could find no bottom. Before McDowell she had claimed him. And before McDowell he had accepted her. He had lived the great lie as he had strengthened himself to live it, but success was no longer a

triumph. There rushed into his brain like a consuming flame the desire to confess the truth, to tell this girl whose arms were about him that he was not Derwent Coniston, her brother, but John Keith, the murderer. Something drove it back, something that was still more potent, more demanding, the overwhelming urge of that fighting force in every man which calls for self-preservation.

Slowly he drew himself away from her, knowing that for this night at least his back was to the wall. She was smiling at him from out of the big chair, and in spite of himself he smiled back at her.

"I must send you to bed now, Mary Josephine, and tomorrow we will talk everything over," he said. "You're so tired you're ready to fall asleep in a minute."

Tiny, puckery lines came into her pretty forehead. It was a trick he loved at first sight.

"Do you know, Derry, I almost believe you've changed a lot. You used to call me 'Juddy.' But now that I'm grown up, I think I like Mary Josephine better,

though you oughtn't to be quite so stiff about it. Derry, tell me honest—are you *afraid* of me?"

"Afraid of you!"

"Yes, because I'm grown up. Don't you like me as well as you did one, two, three, seven years ago? If you did, you wouldn't tell me to go to bed just a few minutes after you've seen me for the first time in all those—those—— Derry, I'm going to cry! I *am!*"

"Don't," he pleaded. "Please don't!"

He felt like a hundred-horned bull in a very small china shop. Mary Josephine herself saved the day for him by jumping suddenly from the big chair, forcing him into it, and snuggling herself on his knees.

"There!" She looked at a tiny watch on her wrist. "We're going to bed in two hours. We've got a lot to talk about that won't wait until tomorrow, Derry. You understand what I mean. I couldn't sleep until you've told me. And you must tell me the truth. I'll love you just the same, no matter what it is. Derry, Derry, *why did you do it?*"

"Do what?" he asked stupidly.

The delicious softness went out of the slim little body on his knees. It grew rigid. He looked hopelessly into the fire, but he could feel the burning inquiry in the girl's eyes. He sensed a swift change passing through her. She seemed scarcely to breathe, and he knew that his answer had been more than inadequate. It either confessed or feigned an ignorance of something which it would have been impossible for him to forget had he been Conniston. He looked up at her at last. The joyous flush had gone out of her face. It was a little drawn. Her hand, which had been snuggling his neck caressingly, slipped down from his shoulder.

"I guess—you'd rather I hadn't come, Derry," she said, fighting to keep a break out of her voice. "And I'll go back, if you want to send me. But I've always dreamed of your promise, that some day you'd send for me or come and get me, and I'd like to know *why* before you tell me to go. Why have you hidden away from me all these years, leaving me among those who you knew hated me as they

hated you? Was it because you didn't care? Or was it because—because——" She bent her head and whispered strangely, "Was it because you were afraid?"

"Afraid?" he repeated slowly, staring again into the fire. "Afraid——" He was going to add "Of what?" but caught the words and held them back.

The birch fire leaped up with a sudden roar into the chimney, and from the heart of the flame he caught again that strange and all-pervading thrill, the sensation of Derwent Conniston's presence very near to him. It seemed to him that for an instant he caught a flash of Conniston's face, and somewhere within him was a whispering which was Conniston's voice. He was possessed by a weird and masterful force that swept over him and conquered him, a thing that was more than intuition and greater than physical desire. It was inspiration. He knew that the Englishman would have him play the game as he was about to play it now.

The girl was waiting for him to answer. Her lips had grown a little more tense. His hesitation, the restraint in his welcome

of her, and his apparent desire to evade that mysterious something which seemed to mean so much to her had brought a shining pain into her eyes. He had seen such a look in the eyes of creatures physically hurt. He reached out with his hands and brushed back the thick, soft hair from about her face. His fingers buried themselves in the silken disarray, and he looked for a moment straight into her eyes before he spoke.

"Little girl, will you tell me the truth?" he asked. "Do I look like the old Derwent Conniston, *your* Derwent Conniston? Do I?"

Her voice was small and troubled, yet the pain was slowly fading out of her eyes as she felt the passionate embrace of his fingers in her hair. "No. You are changed."

"Yes, I am changed. A part of Derwent Conniston died seven years ago. That part of him was dead until he came through that door tonight and saw you. And then it flickered back into life. It is returning slowly, slowly. That which was dead is beginning to rouse itself, beginning

to remember. See, little Mary Josephine. It was this!"

He drew a hand to his forehead and placed a finger on the scar. "I got that seven years ago. It killed a half of Derwent Conniston, the part that should have lived. Do you understand? Until to-night——"

Her eyes startled him, they were growing so big and dark and staring, living fires of understanding and horror. It was hard for him to go on with the lie. "For many weeks I was dead," he struggled on. "And when I came to life physically, I had forgotten a great deal. I had my name, my identity, but only ghastly dreams and visions of what had gone before. I remembered you, but it was in a dream, a strange and haunting dream that was with me always. It seems to me that for an age I have been seeking for a face, a voice, something I loved above all else on earth, something which was always near and yet was never found. It was you, Mary Josephine, you!"

Was it the real Derwent Conniston speaking now? He felt again that over-

whelming force from within which was not his own. The thing that had begun as a lie struck him now as a thing that was truth. It was he, John Keith, who had been questing and yearning and hoping. It was John Keith, and not Conniston, who had returned into a world filled with a desolation of loneliness, and it was to John Keith that a beneficent God had sent this wonderful creature in an hour that was blackest in its despair. He was not lying now. He was fighting. He was fighting to keep for himself the one atom of humanity that meant more to him than all the rest of the human race, fighting to keep a great love that had come to him out of a world in which he no longer had a friend or a home, and to that fight his soul went out as a drowning man grips at a spar on a sea. As the girl's hands came to his face and he heard the yearning, grief-filled cry of his name on her lips, he no longer sensed the things he was saying, but held her close in his arms, kissing her mouth, and her eyes, and her hair, and repeating over and over again that now he had found her he would never give her up. Her

arms clung to him. They were like two children brought together after a long separation, and Keith knew that Conniston's love for this girl who was his sister must have been a splendid thing. And his lie had saved Conniston as well as himself. There had been no time to question the reason for the Englishman's neglect—for his apparent desertion of the girl who had come across the sea to find him. Tonight it was sufficient that *he* was Conniston, and that to him the girl had fallen as a precious heritage.

He stood up with her at last, holding her away from him a little so that he could look into her face wet with tears and shining with happiness. She reached up a hand to his face, so that it touched the scar, and in her eyes he saw an infinite pity, a luminously tender glow of love and sympathy and understanding that no measurements could compass. Gently her hand stroked his scarred forehead. He felt his old world slipping away from under his feet, and with his triumph there surged over him a thankfulness for that indefinable something that had come to him

in time to give him the strength and the courage to lie. For she believed him, utterly and without the shadow of a suspicion she believed him.

"Tomorrow you will help me to remember a great many things," he said. "And now will you let me send you to bed, Mary Josephine?"

She was looking at the scar. "And all those years I didn't know," she whispered. "I didn't know. They told me you were dead, but I knew it was a lie. It was Colonel Reppington——" She saw something in his face that stopped her. "Derry, *don't you remember?*"

"I shall—tomorrow. But tonight I can see nothing and think of nothing but you. Tomorrow——"

She drew his head down swiftly and kissed the brand made by the heated barrel of the Englishman's pistol. "Yes, yes, we must go to bed now, Derry," she cried quickly. "You must not think too much. Tonight it must just be of me. Tomorrow everything will come out right, everything. And now you may send me to bed. Do you remember——"

She caught herself, biting her lip to keep back the word.

"Tell me," he urged. "Do I remember what?"

"How you used to come in at the very last and tuck me in at night, Derry? And how we used to whisper to ourselves there in the darkness, and at last you would kiss me good-night? It was the kiss that always made me go to sleep."

He nodded. "Yes, I remember," he said.

He led her to the spare room, and brought in her two travel-worn bags, and turned on the light. It was a man's room, but Mary Josephine stood for a moment surveying it with delight.

"It's home, Derry, real home," she whispered.

He did not explain to her that it was a borrowed home and that this was his first night in it. Such unimportant details would rest until tomorrow. He showed her the bath and its water system and then explained to Wallie that his sister was in the house and he would have to bunk in the kitchen. At the last he knew what he

was expected to do, what he must do. He kissed Mary Josephine good night. He kissed her twice. And Mary Josephine kissed him and gave him a hug the like of which he had never experienced until this night. It sent him back to the fire with blood that danced like a drunken man's.

He turned the lights out and for an hour sat in the dying glow of the birch. For the first time since he had come from Miriam Kirkstone's he had the opportunity to think, and in thinking he found his brain crowded with cold and unemotional fact. He saw his lie in all its naked immensity. Yet he was not sorry that he had lied. He had saved Conniston. He had saved himself. And he had saved Conniston's sister, to love, to fight for, to protect. It had not been a Judas lie but a lie with his heart and his soul and all the manhood in him behind it. To have told the truth would have made him his own executioner, it would have betrayed the dead Englishman who had given to him his name and all that he possessed, and it would have dragged to a pitiless grief the heart of a girl for whom the sun still con-

tinued to shine. No regret rose before him now. He felt no shame. All that he saw was the fight, the tremendous fight, ahead of him, his fight to make good as Conniston, his fight to play the game as Conniston would have him play it. The inspiration that had come to him as he stood facing the storm from the western mountains possessed him again. He would go to the river's end as he had planned to go before McDowell told him of Shan Tung and Miriam Kirkstone. And he would not go alone. Mary Josephine would go with him.

It was midnight when he rose from the big chair and went to his room. The door was closed. He opened it and entered. Even as his hand groped for the switch on the wall, his nostrils caught the scent of something which was familiar and yet which should not have been there. It filled the room, just as it had filled the big hall at the Kirkstone house, the almost sickening fragrance of agallochum burned in a cigarette. It hung like a heavy incense.

Keith's eyes glared as he scanned the

room under the lights, half expecting to see Shan Tung sitting there waiting for him. It was empty. His eyes leaped to the two windows. The shade was drawn at one, the other was up, and the window itself was open an inch or two above the sill. Keith's hand gripped his pistol as he went to it and drew the curtain. Then he turned to the table on which were the reading lamp and Brady's pipes and tobacco and magazines. On an ash-tray lay the stub of a freshly burned cigarette. Shan Tung had come secretly, but he had made no effort to cover his presence.

It was then that Keith saw something on the table which had not been there before. It was a small, rectangular, teakwood box no larger than a half of the palm of his hand. He had noticed Miriam Kirkstone's nervous fingers toying with just such a box earlier in the evening. They were identical in appearance. Both were covered with an exquisite fabric of oriental carving, and the wood was stained and polished until it shone with the dark luster of ebony. Instantly it flashed upon him that this was the same box he had seen at

Miriam's. She had sent it to him, and Shan Tung had been her messenger. The absurd thought was in his head as he took up a small white square of card that lay on top of the box. The upper side of this card was blank; on the other side, in a script as exquisite in its delicacy as the carving itself, were the words:

"WITH THE COMPLIMENTS OF SHAN TUNG."

In another moment Keith had opened the box. Inside was a carefully folded slip of paper, and on this paper was written a single line. Keith's heart stopped beating, and his blood ran cold as he read what it held for him, a message of doom from Shan Tung in nine words:

"WHAT HAPPENED TO DERWENT CONNISTON? DID YOU KILL HIM?"

XI

STUNNED by a shock that for a few moments paralyzed every nerve center in his body, John Keith stood with the slip of white paper in his hands. He was discovered! That was the one thought that pounded like a hammer in his brain. He was discovered in the very hour of his triumph and exaltation, in that hour when the world had opened its portals of joy and hope for him again and when life itself, after four years of hell, was once more worth the living. Had the shock come a few hours before, he would have taken it differently. He was expecting it then. He had expected it when he entered McDowell's office the first time. He was prepared for it afterward. Discovery, failure, and death were possibilities of the hazardous game he was playing, and he was unafraid, because he had only his life to lose, a life that was not much more

than a hopeless derelict at most. Now it was different. Mary Josephine had come like some rare and wonderful alchemy to transmute for him all leaden things into gold. In a few minutes she had upset the world. She had literally torn aside for him the hopeless chaos in which he saw himself struggling, flooding him with the warm radiance of a great love and a still greater desire. On his lips he could feel the soft thrill of her good-night kiss and about his neck the embrace of her soft arms. She had not gone to sleep yet. Across in the other room she was thinking of him, loving him; perhaps she was on her knees praying for him, even as he held in his fingers Shan Tung's mysterious forewarning of his doom.

The first impulse that crowded in upon him was that of flight, the selfish impulse of personal salvation. He could get away. The night would swallow him up. A moment later he was mentally castigating himself for the treachery of that impulse to Mary Josephine. His floundering senses began to readjust themselves.

Why had Shan Tung given him this

warning? Why had he not gone straight to Inspector McDowell with the astounding disclosure of the fact that the man supposed to be Derwent Conniston was not Derwent Conniston, but John Keith, the murderer of Miriam Kirkstone's father?

The questions brought to Keith a new thrill. He read the note again. It was a definite thing stating a certainty and not a guess. Shan Tung had not shot at random. He knew. He knew that he was not Derwent Conniston but John Keith. And he believed that he had killed the Englishman to steal his identity. In the face of these things he had not gone to McDowell! Keith's eyes fell upon the card again. "With the compliments of Shan Tung." What did the words mean? Why had Shan Tung written them unless —with his compliments—he was giving him a warning and the chance to save himself?

His immediate alarm grew less. The longer he contemplated the slip of paper in his hand, the more he became convinced that the inscrutable Shan Tung was the last individual in the world to stage a bit

of melodrama without some good reason for it. There was but one conclusion he could arrive at. The Chinaman was playing a game of his own, and he had taken this unusual way of advising Keith to make a getaway while the going was good. It was evident that his intention had been to avoid the possibility of a personal discussion of the situation. That, at least, was Keith's first impression.

He turned to examine the window. There was no doubt that Shan Tung had come in that way. Both the sill and curtain bore stains of water and mud, and there was wet dirt on the floor. For once the immaculate oriental had paid no attention to his feet. At the door leading into the big room Keith saw where he had stood for some time, listening, probably when McDowell and Mary Josephine were in the outer room waiting for him. Suddenly his eyes riveted themselves on the middle panel of the door. Brady had intended his color scheme to be old ivory —the panel itself was nearly white—and on it Shan Tung had written heavily with a lead pencil the hour of his presence,

"10.45 P.M." Keith's amazement found voice in a low exclamation. He looked at his watch. It was a quarter-hour after twelve. He had returned to the Shack before ten, and the clever Shan Tung was letting him know in this cryptic fashion that for more than three-quarters of an hour he had listened at the door and spied upon him and Mary Josephine through the keyhole.

Had even such an insignificant person as Wallie been guilty of that act, Keith would have felt like thrashing him. It surprised himself that he experienced no personal feeling of outrage at Shan Tung's frank confession of eavesdropping. A subtle significance began to attach itself more and more to the story his room was telling him. He knew that Shan Tung had left none of the marks of his presence out of bravado, but with a definite purpose. Keith's psychological mind was at all times acutely ready to seize upon possibilities, and just as his positiveness of Conniston's spiritual presence had inspired him to act his lie with Mary Josephine, so did the conviction possess him now that

his room held for him a message of the most vital importance.

In such an emergency Keith employed his own method. He sat down, lighted his pipe again, and centered the full resource of his mind on Shan Tung, dissociating himself from the room and the adventure of the night as much as possible in his objective analysis of the man. Four distinct emotional factors entered into that analysis —fear, distrust, hatred, personal enmity. To his surprise he found himself drifting steadily into an unusual and unexpected mental attitude. From the time he had faced Shan Tung in the inspector's office, he had regarded him as the chief enemy of his freedom, his one great menace. Now he felt neither personal enmity nor hatred for him. Fear and distrust remained, but the fear was impersonal and the distrust that of one who watches a clever opponent in a game or a fight. His conception of Shan Tung changed. He found his occidental mind running parallel with the oriental, bridging the spaces which otherwise it never would have crossed, and at the end it seized upon the

key. It proved to him that his first impulse had been wrong. Shan Tung had not expected him to seek safety in flight. He had given the white man credit for a larger understanding than that. His desire, first of all, had been to let Keith know that he was not the only one who was playing for big stakes, and that another, Shan Tung himself, was gambling a hazard of his own, and that the fraudulent Derwent Conniston was a trump card in that game.

To impress this upon Keith he had, first of all, acquainted him with the fact that he had seen through his deception and that he knew he was John Keith and not Derwent Conniston. He had also let him know that he believed he had killed the Englishman, a logical supposition under the circumstances. This information he had left for Keith was not in the form of an intimidation. There was, indeed, something very near apologetic courtesy in the presence of the card bearing Shan Tung's compliments. The penciling of the hour on the panel of the door, without other notation, was a polite and suggestive hint

He wanted Keith to know that he understood his peculiar situation up until that particular time, that he had heard and possibly seen much that had passed between him and Mary Josephine. The partly opened window, the mud and wet on curtains and floor, and the cigarette stubs were all to call Keith's attention to the box on the table.

Keith could not but feel a certain sort of admiration for the Chinaman. The two questions he must answer now were, What was Shan Tung's game? and What did Shan Tung expect him to do?

Instantly Miriam Kirkstone flashed upon him as the possible motive for Shan Tung's visit. He recalled her unexpected and embarrassing question of that evening, in which she had expressed a suspicion and a doubt as to John Keith's death. He had gone to Miriam's at eight. It must have been very soon after that, and after she had caught a glimpse of the face at the window, that Shan Tung had hurried to the Shack.

Slowly but surely the tangled threads of the night's adventure were unraveling

themselves for Keith. The main facts pressed upon him, no longer smothered in a chaos of theory and supposition. If there had been no Miriam Kirkstone in the big house on the hill, Shan Tung would have gone to McDowell, and he would have been in irons at the present moment. McDowell had been right after all. Miriam Kirkstone was fighting for something that was more than her existence. The thought of that "something" made Keith writhe and his hands clench. Shan Tung had triumphed but not utterly. A part of the fruit of his triumph was still just out of his reach, and the two —beautiful Miss Kirkstone and the deadly Shan Tung—were locked in a final struggle for its possession. In some mysterious way he, John Keith, was to play the winning hand. How or when he could not understand. But of one thing he was convinced; in exchange for whatever winning card he held Shan Tung had offered him his life. Tomorrow he would expect an answer.

That tomorow had already dawned. It was one o'clock when Keith again looked

at his watch. Twenty hours ago he had cooked his last camp-fire breakfast. It was only eighteen hours ago that he had filled himself with the smell of Andy Duggan's bacon, and still more recently that he had sat in the little barber shop on the corner wondering what his fate would be when he faced McDowell. It struck him as incongruous and impossible that only fifteen hours had passed since then. If he possessed a doubt of the reality of it all, the bed was there to help convince him. It was a real bed, and he had not slept in a real bed for a number of years. Wallie had made it ready for him. Its sheets were snow-white. There was a counterpane with a fringe on it and pillows puffed up with billowy invitation, as if they were on the point of floating away. Had they risen before his eyes, Keith would have regarded the phenomenon rather casually. After the swift piling up of the amazing events of those fifteen hours, a floating pillow would have seemed quite in the natural orbit of things. But they did not float. They remained where they were, their white breasts bared to him,

urging upon him a common-sense perspective of the situation. He wasn't going to run away. He couldn't sit up all night. Therefore why not come to them and sleep?

There was something directly personal in the appeal of the pillows and the bed. It was not general; it was for him. And Keith responded.

He made another note of the time, a half-hour after one, when he turned in. He allotted himself four hours of sleep, for it was his intention to be up with the sun.

XII

NECESSITY had made of Keith a fairly accurate human chronometer. In the second year of his fugitivism he had lost his watch. At first it was like losing an arm, a part of his brain, a living friend. From that time until he came into possession of Conniston's timepiece he was his own hour-glass and his own alarm clock. He became proficient.

Brady's bed and the Circe-breasted pillows that supported his head were his undoing. The morning after Shan Tung's visit he awoke to find the sun flooding in through the eastern window of his room. The warmth of it as it fell full in his face, setting his eyes blinking, told him it was too late. He guessed it was eight o'clock. When he fumbled his watch out from under his pillow and looked at it, he found it was a quarter past. He got up quietly, his mind swiftly aligning itself to the happenings of yesterday. He

stretched himself until his muscles snapped, and his chest expanded with deep breaths of air from the windows he had left open when he went to bed. He was fit. He was ready for Shan Tung, for McDowell. And over this physical readiness there surged the thrill of a glorious anticipation. It fairly staggered him to discover how badly he wanted to see Mary Josephine again.

He wondered if she was still asleep and answered that there was little possibility of her being awake—even at eight o'clock. Probably she would sleep until noon, the poor, tired, little thing! He smiled affectionately into the mirror over Brady's dressing-table. And then the unmistakable sound of voices in the outer room took him curiously to the door. They were subdued voices. He listened hard, and his heart pumped faster. One of them was Wallie's voice; the other was Mary Josephine's.

He was amused with himself at the extreme care with which he proceeded to dress. It was an entirely new sensation. Wallie had provided him with the necessaries for a cold sponge and in some mys-

terious interim since their arrival had brushed and pressed the most important of Conniston's things. With the Englishman's wardrobe he had brought up from barracks a small chest which was still locked. Until this morning Keith had not noticed it. It was less than half as large as a steamer trunk and had the appearance of being intended as a strong box rather than a traveling receptacle. It was ribbed by four heavy bands of copper, and the corners and edges were reinforced with the same metal. The lock itself seemed to be impregnable to one without a key. Conniston's name was heavily engraved on a copper tablet just above the lock.

Keith regarded the chest with swiftly growing speculation. It was not a thing one would ordinarily possess. It was an object which, on the face of it, was intended to be inviolate except to its master key, a holder of treasure, a guardian of mystery and of precious secrets. In the little cabin up on the Barren Conniston had said rather indifferently, "You may find something among my things down there that

will help you out." The words flashed back to Keith. Had the Englishman, in that casual and uncommunicative way of his, referred to the contents of this chest? Was it not possible that it held for him a solution to the mystery that was facing him in the presence of Mary Josephine? A sense of conviction began to possess him. He examined the lock more closely and found that with proper tools it could be broken.

He finished dressing and completed his toilet by brushing his beard. On account of Mary Josephine he found himself regarding this hirsute tragedy with a growing feeling of disgust, in spite of the fact that it gave him an appearance rather distinguished and military. He wanted it off. Its chief crime was that it made him look older. Besides, it was inclined to be reddish. And it must tickle and prick like the deuce when—

He brought himself suddenly to salute with an appreciative grin. "You're there, and you've got to stick," he chuckled. After all, he was a likable-looking chap, even with that handicap. He was glad.

He opened his door so quietly that Mary Josephine did not see him at first. Her back was toward him as she bent over the dining-table. Her slim little figure was dressed in some soft stuff all crinkly from packing. Her hair, brown and soft, was piled up in shining coils on the top of her head. For the life of him Keith couldn't keep his eyes from traveling from the top of that glowing head to the little high-heeled feet on the floor. They were adorable, slim little, aristocratic feet with dainty ankles! He stood looking at her until she turned and caught him.

There was a change since last night. She was older. He could see it now, the utter impropriety of his cuddling her up like a baby in the big chair—the impossibility, almost.

Mary Josephine settled his doubt. With a happy little cry she ran to him, and Keith found her arms about him again and her lovely mouth held up to be kissed. He hesitated for perhaps the tenth part of a second, if hesitation could be counted in that space. Then his arms closed about her, and he kissed her. He felt the

snuggle of her face against his breast again, the crush and sweetness of her hair against his lips and cheek. He kissed her again uninvited. Before he could stop the habit, he had kissed her a third time.

Then her hands were at his face, and he saw again that look in her eyes, a deep and anxious questioning behind the shimmer of love in them, something mute and understanding and wonderfully sympathetic, a mothering soul looking at him and praying as it looked. If his life had paid the forfeit the next instant, he could not have helped kissing her a fourth time.

If Mary Josephine had gone to bed with a doubt of his brotherly interest last night, the doubt was removed now. Her cheeks flushed. Her eyes shone. She was palpitantly, excitedly happy. "It's *you*, Derry," she cried. "Oh, it's you as you used to be!"

She seized his hand and drew him toward the table. Wallie thrust in his head from the kitchenette, grinning, and Mary Josephine flashed him back a meaning smile. Keith saw in an instant that Wallie had turned from his heathen gods

to the worship of something infinitely more beautiful. He no longer looked to Keith for instructions.

Mary Josephine sat down opposite Keith at the table. She was telling him, with that warm laughter and happiness in her eyes, how the sun had wakened her, and how she had helped Wallie get breakfast. For the first time Keith was looking at her from a point of vantage; there was just so much distance between them, no more and no less, and the light was right. She was, to him, exquisite. The little puckery lines came into her smooth forehead when he apologized for his tardiness by explaining that he had not gone to bed until one o'clock. Her concern was delightful. She scolded him while Wallie brought in the breakfast, and inwardly he swelled with the irrepressible exultation of a great possessor. He had never had anyone to scold him like that before. It was a scolding which expressed Mary Josephine's immediate proprietorship of him, and he wondered if the pleasure of it made him look as silly as Wallie. His plans were all gone. He had intended to play the

idiotic part of one who had partly lost his memory, but throughout the breakfast he exhibited no sign that he was anything but healthfully normal. Mary Josephine's delight at the improvement of his condition since last night shone in her face and eyes, and he could see that she was strictly, but with apparent unconsciousness, guarding herself against saying anything that might bring up the dread shadow between them. She had already begun to fight her own fight for him, and the thing was so beautiful that he wanted to go round to her, and get down on his knees, and put his head in her lap, and tell her the truth.

It was in the moment of that thought that the look came into his face which brought the questioning little lines into her forehead again. In that instant she caught a glimpse of the hunted man, of the soul that had traded itself, of desire beaten into helplessness by a thing she would never understand. It was gone swiftly, but she had caught it. And for her the scar just under his hair stood for its meaning. The responsive throb in her breast was electric. He felt it, saw it, sensed it to the depth of

his soul, and his faith in himself stood challenged. She believed. And he—was a liar. Yet what a wonderful thing to lie for!

"—He called me up over the telephone, and when I told him to be quiet, that you were still asleep, I think he must have sworn—it sounded like it, but I couldn't hear distinctly—and then he fairly roared at me to wake you up and tell you that you didn't half deserve such a lovely little sister as I am. Wasn't that nice, Derry?"

"You—you're talking about McDowell?"

"To be sure I am talking about Mr. McDowell! And when I told him your injury troubled you more than usual, and that I was glad you were resting, I think I heard him swallow hard. He thinks a lot of you, Derry. And then he asked me *which* injury it was that hurt you, and I told him the one in the head. What did he mean? Were you hurt somewhere else, Derry?"

Keith swallowed hard, too. "Not to speak of," he said. "You see, Mary Josephine, I've got a tremendous surprise for

you, if you'll promise it won't spoil your appetite. Last night was the first night I've spent in a real bed for three years."

And then, without waiting for her questions, he began to tell her the epic story of John Keith. With her sitting opposite him, her beautiful, wide-open, gray eyes looking at him with amazement as she sensed the marvelous coincidence of their meeting, he told it as he had not told it to McDowell or even to Miriam Kirkstone. A third time the facts were the same. But it was John Keith now who was telling John Keith's story through the lips of an unreal and negative Conniston. He forgot his own breakfast, and a look of gloom settled on Wallie's face when he peered in through the door and saw that their coffee and toast were growing cold. Mary Josephine leaned a little over the table. Not once did she interrupt Keith. Never had he dreamed of a glory that might reflect his emotions as did her eyes. As he swept from pathos to storm, from the madness of long, black nights to starvation and cold, as he told of flight, of pursuit, of the merciless struggle that ended at last

in the capture of John Keith, as he gave to these things words and life pulsing with the beat of his own heart, he saw them revisioned in those wonderful gray eyes, cold at times with fear, warm and glowing at other times with sympathy, and again shining softly with a glory of pride and love that was meant for him alone. With him she was present in the little cabin up in the big Barren. Until he told of those days and nights of hopeless desolation, of racking cough and the nearness of death, and of the comradeship of brothers that had come as a final benediction to the hunter and the hunted, until in her soul she was understanding and living those terrible hours as they two had lived them, he did not know how deep and dark and immeasurably tender that gray mystery of beauty in her eyes could be. From that hour he worshiped them as he worshiped no other part of her.

"And from all that you came back the same day I came," she said in a low, awed voice. "You came back from *that!*"

He remembered the part he must play. "Yes, three years of it. If I could only

remember as well, only half as well, things that happened before this——" He raised a hand to his forehead, to the scar.

"You will," she whispered swiftly. "Derry, darling, you will!"

Wallie sidled in and, with an adoring grin at Mary Josephine, suggested that he had more coffee and toast ready to serve, piping hot. Keith was relieved. The day had begun auspiciously, and over the bacon and eggs, done to a ravishing brown by the little Jap, he told Mary Josephine of some of his bills of fare in the north and how yesterday he had filled up on bacon smell at Andy Duggan's. Steak from the cheek of a walrus, he told her, was equal to porterhouse; seal meat wasn't bad, but one grew tired of it quickly unless he was an Eskimo; polar bear meat was filling but tough and strong. He liked whale meat, especially the tail-steaks of narwhal, and cold boiled blubber was good in the winter, only it was impossible to cook it because of lack of fuel, unless one was aboard ship or had an alcohol stove in his outfit. The tidbit of the Eskimo was birds'-eggs, gathered by the ton in summer-time, rotten be-

fore cold weather came, and frozen solid as chunks of ice in winter. Through one starvation period of three weeks he had lived on them himself, crunching them raw in his mouth as one worries away with a piece of rock candy. The little lines gathered in Mary Josephine's forehead at this, but they smoothed away into laughter when he humorously described the joy of living on nothing at all but air. And he added to this by telling her how the gluttonous Eskimo at feast-time would lie out flat on their backs so that their womenfolk could feed them by dropping chunks of flesh into their open maws until their stomachs swelled up like the crops of birds overstuffed with grain.

It was a successful breakfast. When it was over, Keith felt that he had achieved a great deal. Before they rose from the table, he startled Mary Josephine by ordering Wallie to bring him a cold chisel and a hammer from Brady's tool-chest.

"I've lost the key that opens my chest, and I've got to break in," he explained to her.

Mary Josephine's little laugh was deli-

cious. "After what you told me about frozen eggs, I thought perhaps you were going to eat some," she said.

She linked her arm in his as they walked into the big room, snuggling her head against his shoulder so that, leaning over, his lips were buried in one of the soft, shining coils of her hair. And she was making plans, enumerating them on the tips of her fingers. If he had business outside, she was going with him. Wherever he went she was going. There was no doubt in her mind about that. She called his attention to a trunk that had arrived while he slept, and assured him she would be ready for outdoors by the time he had opened his chest. She had a little blue suit she was going to wear. And her hair? Did it look good enough for his friends to see? She had put it up in a hurry.

"It is beautful, glorious," he said.

Her face pinked under the ardency of his gaze. She put a finger to the tip of his nose, laughing at him. "Why, Derry, if you weren't my brother I'd think you were my lover! You said that as though you meant it *terribly* much. Do you?"

He felt a sudden dull stab of pain. "Yes, I mean it. It's glorious. And so are you, Mary Josephine, every bit of you."

On tiptoe she gave him the warm sweetness of her lips again. And then she ran away from him, joy and laughter in her face, and disappeared into her room. "You must hurry or I shall beat you," she called back to him.

XIII

IN his own room, with the door closed and locked, Keith felt again that dull, strange pain that made his heart sick and the air about him difficult to breathe.

"If you weren't my brother."

The words beat in his brain. They were pounding at his heart until it was smothered, laughing at him and taunting him and triumphing over him just as, many times before, the raving voices of the weird wind-devils had scourged him from out of black night and arctic storm. *Her brother!* His hand clenched until the nails bit into his flesh. No, he hadn't thought of that part of the fight! And now it swept upon him in a deluge. If he lost in the fight that was ahead of him, his life would pay the forfeit. The law would take him, and he would hang. And if he won—she would be his sister forever and to the end of all time! Just that, and no

more. His *sister!* And the agony of truth gripped him that it was not as a brother that he saw the glory in her hair, the glory in her eyes and face, and the glory in her slim little, beautiful body—but as the lover. A merciless preordination had stacked the cards against him again. He was Conniston, and she was Conniston's sister.

A strong man, a man in whom blood ran red, there leaped up in him for a moment a sudden and unreasoning rage at that thing which he had called fate. He saw the unfairness of it all, the hopelessness of it, the cowardly subterfuge and trickery of life itself as it had played against him, and with tightly set lips and clenched hands he called mutely on God Almighty to play the game square. Give him a chance! Give him just one square deal, only one; let him see a way, let him fight a man's fight with a ray of hope ahead! In these red moments hope emblazoned itself before his eyes as a monstrous lie. Bitterness rose in him until he was drunk with it, and blasphemy filled his heart. Whichever way he turned, however hard he fought,

there was no chance of winning. From the day he killed Kirkstone the cards had been stacked against him, and they were stacked now and would be stacked until the end. He had believed in God, he had believed in the inevitable ethics of the final reckoning of things, and he had believed strongly that an impersonal Something more powerful than man-made will was behind him in his struggles. These beliefs were smashed now. Toward them he felt the impulse of a maddened beast trampling hated things under foot. They stood for lies—treachery—cheating—yes, contemptible cheating! It was impossible for him to win. However he played, whichever way he turned, he must lose. For he was Conniston, and she was Conniston's sister, *and must be to the end of time.*

Faintly, beyond the door, he heard Mary Josephine singing. Like a bit of steel drawn to a tension his normal self snapped back into place. His readjustment came with a lurch, a subtle sort of shock. His hands unclenched, the tense lines in his face relaxed, and because that God Al-

mighty he had challenged had given to him an unquenchable humor, he saw another thing where only smirking ghouls and hypocrites had rent his brain with their fiendish exultations a moment before. It was Conniston's face, suave, smiling, dying, triumphant over life, and Conniston was saying, just as he had said up there in the cabin on the Barren, with death reaching out a hand for him, "It's queer, old top, devilish queer—and funny!"

Yes, it was funny if one looked at it right, and Keith found himself swinging back into his old view-point. It was the hugest joke life had ever played on him. His sister! He could fancy Conniston twisting his mustaches, his cool eyes glimmering with silent laughter, looking on his predicament, and he could fancy Conniston saying: "It's funny, old top, devilish funny—but it'll be funnier still when some other man comes along and carries her off!"

And he, John Keith, would have to grin and bear it because he was her brother!

Mary Josephine was tapping at his door.

"Derwent Conniston," she called frigidly, "there's a female person on the telephone asking for you. What shall I say?"

"Er—why—tell her you're my sister, Mary Josephine, and if it's Miss Kirkstone, be nice to her and say I'm not able to come to the 'phone, and that you're looking forward to meeting her, and that we'll be up to see her some time today."

"Oh, indeed!"

"You see," said Keith, his mouth close to the door, "you see, this Miss Kirkstone——"

But Mary Josephine was gone.

Keith grinned. His illimitable optimism was returning. Sufficient for the day that she was there, that she loved him, that she belonged to him, that just now he was the arbiter of her destiny! Far off in the mountains he dreamed of, alone, just they two, what might not happen? Some day——

With the cold chisel and the hammer he went to the chest. His task was one that numbed his hands before the last of the three locks was broken. He dragged the chest more into the light and opened it.

He was disappointed. At first glance he could not understand why Conniston had locked it at all. It was almost empty, so nearly empty that he could see the bottom of it, and the first object that met his eyes was an insult to his expectations—an old sock with a huge hole in the toe of it. Under the sock was an old fur cap not of the kind worn north of Montreal. There was a chain with a dog-collar attached to it, a hip-pocket pistol and a huge forty-five, and not less than a hundred cartridges of indiscriminate calibers scattered loosely about. At one end, bundled in carelessly, was a pair of riding-breeches, and under the breeches a pair of white shoes with rubber soles. There was neither sentiment nor reason to the collection in the chest. It was junk. Even the big forty-five had a broken hammer, and the pistol, Keith thought, might have stunned a fly at close range. He pawed the things over with the cold chisel, and the last thing he came upon—buried under what looked like a cast-off sport shirt—was a pasteboard shoe box. He raised the cover. The box was full of papers.

Here was promise. He transported the box to Brady's table and sat down. He examined the larger papers first. There were a couple of old game licenses for Manitoba, half a dozen pencil-marked maps, chiefly of the Peace River country, and a number of letters from the secretaries of Boards of Trade pointing out the incomparable possibilities their respective districts held for the homesteader and the buyer of land. Last of all came a number of newspaper clippings and a packet of letters.

Because they were loose he seized upon the clippings first, and as his eyes fell upon the first paragraph of the first clipping his body became suddenly tensed in the shock of unexpected discovery and amazed interest. There were six of the clippings, all from English papers, English in their terseness, brief as stock exchange reports, and equally to the point. He read the six in three minutes.

They simply stated that Derwent Conniston, of the Connistons of Darlington, was wanted for burglary—and that up to date he had not been found.

Keith gave a gasp of incredulity. He looked again to see that his eyes were not tricking him. And it was there in cold, implacable print.

Derwent Conniston—that phœnix among men, by whom he had come to measure all other men, that Crichton of nerve, of calm and audacious courage, of splendid poise —a burglar! It was cheap, farcical, an impossible absurdity. Had it been murder, high treason, defiance of some great law, a great crime inspired by a great passion or a great ideal, but it was burglary, brigandage of the cheapest and most commonplace variety, a sneaking night-coward's plagiarism of real adventure and real crime. It was impossible. Keith gritted the words aloud. He might have accepted Conniston as a Dick Turpin, a Claude Duval or a Macheath, but not as a Jeremy Diddler or a Bill Sykes. The printed lines were lies. They must be. Derwent Conniston might have killed a dozen men, but he had never cracked a safe. To think it was to think the inconceivable.

He turned to the letters. They were postmarked Darlington, England. His

fingers tingled as he opened the first. It was as he had expected, as he had hoped. They were from Mary Josephine. He arranged them—nine in all—in the sequence of their dates, which ran back nearly eight years. All of them had been written within a period of eleven months. They were as legible as print. And as he passed from the first to the second, and from the second to the third, and then read on into the others, he forgot there was such a thing as time and that Mary Josephine was waiting for him. The clippings had told him one thing; here, like bits of driftage to be put together, a line in this place and half a dozen in that, in paragraphs that enlightened and in others that puzzled, was the other side of the story, a growing thing that rose up out of mystery and doubt in segments and fractions of segments adding themselves together piecemeal, welding the whole into form and substance, until there rode through Keith's veins a wild thrill of exultation and triumph.

And then he came to the ninth and last letter. It was in a different hand-

writing, brief, with a deadly specificness about it that gripped Keith as he read.

This ninth letter he held in his hand as he rose from the table, and out of his mouth there fell, unconsciously, Conniston's own words, "It's devilish queer, old top—and funny!"

There was no humor in the way he spoke them. His voice was hard, his eyes dully ablaze. He was looking back into that swirling, unutterable loneliness of the northland, and he was seeing Conniston again.

Fiercely he caught up the clippings, struck a match, and with a grim smile watched them as they curled up into flame and crumbled into ash. What a lie was life, what a malformed thing was justice, what a monster of iniquity the man-fabricated thing called law!

And again he found himself speaking, as if the dead Englishman himself were repeating the words, "It's devilish queer, old top—and funny!"

XIV

A QUARTER of an hour later, with Mary Josephine at his side, he was walking down the green slope toward the Saskatchewan. In that direction lay the rims of timber, the shimmering valley, and the broad pathways that opened into the plains beyond.

The town was at their backs, and Keith wanted it there. He wanted to keep McDowell, and Shan Tung, and Miriam Kirkstone as far away as possible, until his mind rode more smoothly in the new orbit in which it was still whirling a bit unsteadily. More than all else he wanted to be alone with Mary Josephine, to make sure of her, to convince himself utterly that she was his to go on fighting for. He sensed the nearness and the magnitude of the impending drama. He knew that today he must face Shan Tung, that again he must go under the battery of McDowell's eyes and brain, and that like a

fish in treacherous waters he must swim cleverly to avoid the nets that would entangle and destroy him. Today was *the* day—the stage was set, the curtain about to be lifted, the play ready to be enacted. But before it was the prologue. And the prologue was Mary Josephine's.

At the crest of a dip halfway down the slope they had paused, and in this pause he stood a half-step behind her so that he could look at her for a moment without being observed. She was bareheaded, and it came upon him all at once how wonderful was a woman's hair, how beautiful beyond all other things beautiful and desirable. In twisted, glowing seductiveness it was piled up on Mary Josephine's head, transformed into brown and gold glories by the sun. He wanted to put forth his hand to it, and bury his fingers in it, and feel the thrill and the warmth and the crush of the palpitant life of it against his own flesh. And then, bending a little forward, he saw under her long lashes the sheer joy of life shining in her eyes as she drank in the wonderful panorama that lay below them to the west. Last night's

rain had freshened it, the sun glorified it now, and the fragrance of earthly smells that rose up to them from it was the undefiled breath of a thing living and awake. Even to Keith the river had never looked more beautiful, and never had his yearnings gone out to it more strongly than in this moment, to the river and beyond—and to the back of beyond, where the mountains rose up to meet the blue sky and the river itself was born. And he heard Mary Josephine's voice, joyously suppressed, exclaiming softly,

"Oh, Derry!"

His heart was filled with gladness. She, too, was seeing what his eyes saw in that wonderland. And she was feeling it. Her hand, seeking his hand, crept into his palm, and the fingers of it clung to his fingers. He could feel the thrill of the miracle passing through her, the miracle of the open spaces, the miracle of the forests rising billow on billow to the purple mists of the horizon, the miracle of the golden Saskatchewan rolling slowly and peacefully in its slumbering sheen out of that mighty mysteryland that reached to the

lap of the setting sun. He spoke to her of that land as she looked, wide-eyed, quick-breathing, her fingers closing still more tightly about his. This was but the beginning of the glory of the west and the north, he told her. Beyond that low horizon, where the tree tops touched the sky were the prairies—not the tiresome monotony which she had seen from the car windows, but the wide, glorious, God-given country of the Northwest with its thousands of lakes and rivers and its tens of thousands of square miles of forests; and beyond those things, still farther, were the foothills, and beyond the foothills the mountains. And in those mountains the river down there had its beginning.

She looked up swiftly, her eyes brimming with the golden flash of the sun. "It is wonderful! And just over there is the town!"

"Yes, and beyond the town are the cities."

"And off there——"

"God's country," said Keith devoutly.

Mary Josephine drew a deep breath. "And people still live in towns and

cities!" she exclaimed in wondering credulity. "I've dreamed of 'over here,' Derry, but I never dreamed that. And you've had it for years and years, while I—oh, Derry!"

And again those two words filled his heart with gladness, words of loving reproach, atremble with the mysterious whisper of a great desire. For she was looking into the west. And her eyes and her heart and her soul were in the west, and suddenly Keith saw his way as though lighted by a flaming torch. He came near to forgetting that he was Conniston. He spoke of his dream, his desire, and told her that last night—before she came—he had made up his mind to go. She had come to him just in time. A little later and he would have been gone, buried utterly away from the world in the wonderland of the mountains. And now they would go together. They would go as he had planned to go, quietly, unobtrusively; they would slip away and disappear. There was a reason why no one should know, not even McDowell. It must be their secret. Some day he would tell her why. Her heart

thumped excitedly as he went on like a boy planning a wonderful day. He could see the swifter beat of it in the flush that rose into her face and the joy glowing tremulously in her eyes as she looked at him. They would get ready quietly. They might go tomorrow, the next day, any time. It would be a glorious adventure, just they two, with all the vastness of that mountain paradise ahead of them.

"We'll be pals," he said. "Just you and me, Mary Josephine. We're all that's left."

It was his first experiment, his first reference to the information he had gained in the letters, and swift as a flash Mary Josephine's eyes turned up to him. He nodded, smiling. He understood their quick questioning, and he held her hand closer and began to walk with her down the slope.

"A lot of it came back last night and this morning, a lot of it," he explained. "It's queer what miracles small things can work sometimes, isn't it? Think what a grain of sand can do to a watch! This was one of the small things." He was still smiling as he touched the scar on

his forehead. "And you, you were the other miracle. And I'm remembering. It doesn't seem like seven or eight years, but only yesterday, that the grain of sand got mixed up somewhere in the machinery in my head. And I guess there was another reason for my going wrong. You'll understand, when I tell you."

Had he been Conniston it could not have come from him more naturally, more sincerely. He was living the great lie, and yet to him it was no longer a lie. He did not hesitate, as shame and conscience might have made him hesitate. He was fighting that something beautiful might be raised up out of chaos and despair and be made to exist; he was fighting for life in place of death, for happiness in place of grief, for light in place of darkness—fighting to save where others would destroy. Therefore the great lie was not a lie but a thing without venom or hurt, an instrument for happiness and for all the things good and beautiful that went to make happiness. It was his one great weapon. Without it he would fail, and failure meant desolation. So he spoke convincingly, for what he

said came straight from the heart though it was born in the shadow of that one master-falsehood. His wonder was that Mary Josephine believed him so utterly that not for an instant was there a questioning doubt in her eyes or on her lips.

He told her how much he "remembered," which was no more and no less than he had learned from the letters and the clippings. The story did not appeal to him as particularly unusual or dramatic. He had passed through too many tragic happenings in the last four years to regard it in that way. It was simply an unfortunate affair beginning in misfortune, and with its necessary whirlwind of hurt and sorrow. The one thing of shame he would not keep out of his mind was that he, Derwent Conniston, must have been a poor type of big brother in those days of nine or ten years ago, even though little Mary Josephine had worshiped him. He was well along in his twenties then. The Connistons of Darlington were his uncle and aunt, and his uncle was a more or less prominent figure in ship-building interests on the Clyde. With these people the three

—himself, Mary Josephine, and his brother Egbert—had lived, "farmed out" to a hard-necked, flinty-hearted pair of relatives because of a brother's stipulation and a certain English law. With them they had existed in mutual discontent and dislike. Derwent, when he became old enough, had stepped over the traces. All this Keith had gathered from the letters, but there was a great deal that was missing. Egbert, he gathered, must have been a scapegrace. He was a cripple of some sort and seven or eight years his junior. In the letters Mary Josephine had spoken of him as "poor Egbert," pitying instead of condemning him, though it was Egbert who had brought tragedy and separation upon them. One night Egbert had broken open the Conniston safe and in the darkness had had a fight and a narrow escape from his uncle, who laid the crime upon Derwent. And Derwent, in whom Egbert must have confided, had fled to America that the cripple might be saved, with the promise that some day he would send for Mary Josephine. He was followed by the uncle's threat that if he ever returned to

England, he would be jailed. Not long afterward "poor Egbert" was found dead in bed, fearfully contorted. Keith guessed there had been something mentally as well as physically wrong with him.

"—And I was going to send for you," he said, as they came to the level of the valley. "My plans were made, and I was going to send for you, when this came."

He stopped, and in a few tense, breathless moments Mary Josephine read the ninth and last letter he had taken from the Englishman's chest.

It was from her uncle. In a dozen lines it stated that she, Mary Josephine, was dead, and it reiterated the threat against Derwent Conniston should he ever dare to return to England.

A choking cry came to her lips. "And that—*that* was it?"

"Yes, that—and the hurt in my head," he said, remembering the part he must play. "They came at about the same time, and the two of them must have put the grain of sand in my brain."

It was hard to lie now, looking straight into her face that had gone suddenly white,

and with her wonderful eyes burning deep into his soul.

She did not seem, for an instant, to hear his voice or sense his words. "I understand now," she was saying, the letter crumpling in her fingers. "I was sick for almost a year, Derry. They thought I was going to die. He must have written it then, and they destroyed my letters to you, and when I was better they told me you were dead, and then I didn't write any more. And I wanted to die. And then, almost a year ago, Colonel Reppington came to me, and his dear old voice was so excited that it trembled, and he told me that he believed you were alive. A friend of his had just returned from British Columbia, and this friend told him that three years before, while on a grizzly shooting trip, he had met a man named Conniston, an Englishman. We wrote a hundred letters up there and found the man, Jack Otto, who was in the mountains with you, and then I knew you were alive. But we couldn't find you after that, and so I came——"

He would have wagered that she was

going to cry, but she fought the tears back, smiling.

"And—and I've found you!" she finished triumphantly.

She snuggled close to him, and he slipped an arm about her waist, and they walked on. She told him about her arrival in Halifax, how Colonel Reppington had given her letters to nice people in Montreal and Winnipeg, and how it happened one day that she found his name in one of the Mounted Police blue books, and after that came on as fast as she could to surprise him at Prince Albert. When she came to that point, Keith pointed once more into the west and said:

"And there is our new world. Let us forget the old. Shall we, Mary Josephine?"

"Yes," she whispered, and her hand sought his again and crept into it, warm and confident.

XV

THEY went on through the golden morning, the earth damp under their feet, the air filled with its sweet incense, on past scattered clumps of balsams and cedars until they came to the river and looked down on its yellow sand-bars glistening in the sun. The town was hidden. They heard no sound from it. And looking up the great Saskatchewan, the river of mystery, of romance, of glamour, they saw before them, where the spruce walls seemed to meet, the wide-open door through which they might pass into the western land beyond. Keith pointed it out. And he pointed out the yellow bars, the glistening shores of sand, and told her how even as far as this, a thousand miles by river—those sands brought gold with them from the mountains, the gold whose treasure-house no man had ever found, and which must be hidden up there somewhere near the river's end. His dream, like

Duggan's, had been to find it. Now they would search for it together.

Slowly he was picking his way so that at last they came to the bit of cleared timber in which was his old home. His heart choked him as they drew near. There was an uncomfortable tightness in his breath. The timber was no longer "clear." In four years younger generations of life had sprung up among the trees, and the place was jungle-ridden. They were within a few yards of the house before Mary Josephine saw it, and then she stopped suddenly with a little gasp. For this that she faced was not desertion, was not mere neglect. It was tragedy. She saw in an instant that there was no life in this place, and yet it stood as if tenanted. It was a log château with a great, red chimney rising at one end. Curtains and shades still hung at the windows. There were three chairs on the broad veranda that looked riverward. But two of the windows were broken, and the chairs were falling into ruin. There was no life. They were facing only the ghosts of life.

A swift glance into Keith's face told her this was so. His lips were set tight. There was a strange look in his face. Hand in hand they had come up, and her fingers pressed his tighter now.

"What is it?" she asked.

"It is John Keith's home as he left it four years ago," he replied.

The suspicious break in his voice drew her eyes from the château to his own again. She could see him fighting. There was a twitching in his throat. His hand was gripping hers until it hurt.

"John Keith?" she whispered softly.

"Yes, John Keith."

She inclined her head so that it rested lightly and affectionately against his arm. "You must have thought a great deal of him, Derry."

"Yes."

He freed her hand, and his fists clenched convulsively. She could feel the cording of the muscles in his arm, his face was white, and in his eyes was a fixed stare that startled her. He fumbled in a pocket and drew out a key.

"I promised, when he died, that I

would go in and take a last look for him," he said. "He loved this place. Do you want to go with me?"

She drew a deep breath. "Yes."

The key opened the door that entered on the veranda. As it swung back, grating on its rusty hinges, they found themselves facing the chill of a cold and lifeless air. Keith stepped inside. A glance told him that nothing was changed—everything was there in that room with the big fireplace, even as he had left it the night he set out to force justice from Judge Kirkstone. One thing startled him. On the dust-covered table was a bowl and a spoon. He remembered vividly how he had eaten his supper that night of bread and milk. It was the littleness of the thing, the simplicity of it, that shocked him. The bowl and spoon were still there after four years. He did not reflect that they were as imperishable as all the other things about; the miracle was that they were there on the table, as though he had used them only yesterday. The most trivial things in the room struck him deepest, and he found

himself fighting hard, for a moment, to keep his nerve.

"He told me about the bowl and the spoon, John Keith did," he said, nodding toward them. "He told me just what I'd find here, even to that. You see, he loved the place greatly and everything that was in it. It was impossible for him to forget even the bowl and the spoon and where he had left them."

It was easier after that. The old home was whispering back its memories to him, and he told them to Mary Josephine as they went slowly from room to room, until John Keith was living there before her again, the John Keith whom Derwent Conniston had run to his death. It was this thing that gripped her, and at last what was in her mind found voice.

"It wasn't *you* who made him die, was it, Derry? It wasn't you?"

"No. It was the law. He died, as I told you, of a frosted lung. At the last I would have shared my life with him had it been possible. McDowell must never know that. You must never speak of John Keith before him."

"I—I understand, Derry."

"And he must not know that we came here. To him John Keith was a murderer whom it was his duty to hang."

She was looking at him strangely. Never had he seen her look at him in that way.

"Derry," she whispered.

"Yes?"

"Derry, *is John Keith alive?*"

He started. The shock of the question was in his face. He caught himself, but it was too late. And in an instant her hand was at his mouth, and she was whispering eagerly, almost fiercely:

"No, no, no—don't answer me, Derry! *Don't answer me!* I know, and I understand, and I'm glad, glad, *glad!* He's alive, and it was you who let him live, the big, glorious brother I'm proud of! And everyone else thinks he's dead. But don't answer me, Derry, don't answer me!"

She was trembling against him. His arms closed about her, and he held her nearer to his heart, and longer, than he had ever held her before. He kissed her

hair many times, and her lips once, and up about his neck her arms twined softly, and a great brightness was in her eyes.

"I understand," she whispered again. "I understand."

"And I—I must answer you," he said. "I must answer you, because I love you, and because you must know. Yes, John Keith is alive!"

XVI

AN hour later, alone and heading for the inspector's office, Keith felt in battle trim. His head was fairly singing with the success of the morning. Since the opening of Conniston's chest many things had happened, and he was no longer facing a blank wall of mystery. His chief cause of exhilaration was Mary Josephine. She wanted to go away with him. She wanted to go with him anywhere, everywhere, as long as they were together. When she had learned that his term of enlistment was about to expire and that if he remained in the Service he would be away from her a great deal, she had pleaded with him not to reënlist. She did not question him when he told her that it might be necessary to go away very suddenly, without letting another soul know of their movements, not even Wallie. Intuitively she guessed that the reason had something to do with John Keith, for he

had let the fear grow in her that McDowell might discover he had been a traitor to the Service, in which event the Law itself would take him away from her for a considerable number of years. And with that fear she was more than ever eager for the adventure, and planned with him for its consummation.

Another thing cheered Keith. He was no longer the absolute liar of yesterday, for by a fortunate chance he had been able to tell her that John Keith was alive. This most important of all truths he had confided to her, and the confession had roused in her a comradeship that had proclaimed itself ready to fight for him or run away with him. Not for an instant had she regretted the action he had taken in giving Keith his freedom. He was peculiarly happy because of that. She was glad John Keith was alive.

And now that she knew the story of the old home down in the clump of timber and of the man who had lived there, she was anxious to meet Miriam Kirkstone, daughter of the man he had killed. Keith had promised her they would go up that after-

noon. Within himself he knew that he was not sure of keeping the promise. There was much to do in the next few hours, and much might happen. In fact there was but little speculation about it. This was the big day. Just what it held for him he could not be sure until he saw Shan Tung. Any instant might see him put to the final test.

Cruze was pacing slowly up and down the hall when Keith entered the building in which McDowell had his offices. The young secretary's face bore a perplexed and rather anxious expression. His hands were buried deep in his trousers pockets, and he was puffing a cigarette. At Keith's appearance he brightened up a bit.

"Don't know what to make of the governor this morning, by Jove I don't!" he explained, nodding toward the closed doors. "I've got instructions to let no one near him except you. You may go in."

"What seems to be the matter?" Keith felt out cautiously.

Cruze shrugged his thin shoulders, flipped the ash from his cigarette, and with a grimace said, "Shan Tung."

"Shan Tung?" Keith spoke the name in a sibilant whisper. Every nerve in him had jumped, and for an instant he thought he had betrayed himself. Shan Tung had been there early. And now McDowell was waiting for him and had given instructions that no other should be admitted. If the Chinaman had exposed him, why hadn't McDowell sent officers up to the Shack? That was the first question that jumped into his head. The answer came as quickly—McDowell had not sent officers because, hating Shan Tung, he had not believed his story. But he was waiting there to investigate. A chill crept over Keith.

Cruze was looking at him intently. "There's something to this Shan Tung business," he said. "It's even getting on the old man's nerves. And he's very anxious to see you, Mr. Conniston. I've called you up half a dozen times in the last hour."

He flipped away his cigarette, turned alertly, and moved toward the inspector's door. Keith wanted to call him back, to leap upon him, if necessary, and drag him

away from that deadly door. But he neither moved nor spoke until it was too late. The door opened, he heard Cruze announce his presence, and it seemed to him the words were scarcely out of the secretary's mouth when McDowell himself stood in the door.

"Come in, Conniston," he said quietly. "Come in."

It was not McDowell's voice. It was restrained, terrible. It was the voice of a man speaking softly to cover a terrific fire raging within. Keith felt himself doomed. Even as he entered, his mind was swiftly gathering itself for the last play, the play he had set for himself if the crisis came. He would cover McDowell, bind and gag him even as Cruze sauntered in the hall, escape through a window, and with Mary Josephine bury himself in the forests before pursuit could overtake them. Therefore his amazement was unbounded when McDowell, closing the door, seized his hand in a grip that made him wince, and shook it with unfeigned gladness and relief.

"I'm not condemning you, of course,"

he said. "It was rather beastly of me to annoy your sister before you were up this morning. She flatly refused to rouse you, and by George, the way she said it made me turn the business of getting into touch with you over to Cruze. Sit down, Conniston. I'm going to explode a mine under you."

He flung himself into his swivel chair and twisted one of his fierce mustaches, while his eyes blazed at Keith. Keith waited. He saw the other was like an animal ready to spring and anxious to spring, the one evident stricture on his desire being that there was nothing to spring at unless it was himself.

"What happened last night?" he asked.

Keith's mind was already working swiftly. McDowell's question gave him the opportunity of making the first play against Shan Tung.

"Enough to convince me that I am going to see Shan Tung today," he said.

He noticed the slow clenching and unclenching of McDowell's fingers about the arms of his chair.

"Then—I was right?"

"I have every reason to believe you were—up to a certain point. I shall know positively when I have talked with Shan Tung."

He smiled grimly. McDowell's eyes were no harder than his own. The iron man drew a deep breath and relaxed a bit in his chair.

"If anything should happen," he said, looking away from Keith, as though the speech were merely casual, "if he attacks you——"

"It might be necessary to kill him in self-defense," finished Keith.

McDowell made no sign to show that he had heard, yet Keith thrilled with the conviction that he had struck home. He went on telling briefly what had happened at Miriam Kirkstone's house the preceding night. McDowell's face was purple when he described the evidences of Shan Tung's presence at the house on the hill, but with a mighty effort he restrained his passion.

"That's it, that's it," he exclaimed, choking back his wrath. "I knew he was there! And this morning both of them lie about it—both of them, do you understand!

She lied, looking me straight in the eyes. And he lied, and for the first time in his life he laughed at me, curse me if he didn't! It was like the gurgle of oil. I didn't know a human could laugh that way. And on top of that he told me something that I *won't* believe, so help me God, I won't!"

He jumped to his feet and began pacing back and forth, his hands clenched behind him. Suddenly he whirled on Keith.

"Why in heaven's name didn't you bring Keith back with you, or, if not Keith, at least a written confession, signed by him?" he demanded.

This was a blow from behind for Keith. "What—what has Keith got to do with this?" he stumbled.

"More than I dare tell you, Conniston. But *why* didn't you bring back a signed confession from him? A dying man is usually willing to make that."

"If he is guilty, yes," agreed Keith. "But this man was a different sort. If he killed Judge Kirkstone, he had no regret. He did not consider himself a criminal. He felt that he had dealt out

justice in his own way, and therefore, even when he was dying, he would not sign anything or state anything definitely."

McDowell subsided into his chair. "And the curse of it is I haven't a thing on Shan Tung," he gritted. "Not a thing. Miriam Kirkstone is her own mistress, and in the eyes of the law he is as innocent of crime as I am. If she is voluntarily giving herself as a victim to this devil, it is her own business—legally, you understand. Morally——"

He stopped, his savagely gleaming eyes boring Keith to the marrow.

"He hates you as a snake hates firewater. It is possible, if he thought the opportunity had come to him——"

Again he paused, cryptic, waiting for the other to gather the thing he had not spoken. Keith, simulating two of Conniston's tricks at the same time, shrugged a shoulder and twisted a mustache as he rose to his feet. He smiled coolly down at the iron man. For once he gave a passable imitation of the Englishman.

"And he's going to have the opportunity today," he said understandingly. "I think,

old chap, I'd better be going. I'm rather anxious to see Shan Tung before dinner."

McDowell followed him to the door. His face had undergone a change. There was a tense expectancy, almost an eagerness there. Again he gripped Keith's hand, and before the door opened he said,

"If trouble comes between you let it be in the open, Conniston—in the open and not on Shan Tung's premises."

Keith went out, his pulse quickening to the significance of the iron man's words, and wondering what the "mine" was that McDowell had promised to explode, but which he had not.

XVII

KEITH lost no time in heading for Shan Tung's. He was like a man playing chess, and the moves were becoming so swift and so intricate that his mind had no rest. Each hour brought forth its fresh necessities and its new alternatives. It was McDowell who had given him his last cue, perhaps the surest and safest method of all for winning his game. The iron man, that disciple of the Law who was merciless in his demand of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, had let him understand that the world would be better off without Shan Tung. This man, who never in his life had found an excuse for the killer, now maneuvered subtly the suggestion for a killing.

Keith was both shocked and amazed. "If anything happens, let it be in the open and not on Shan Tung's premises," he had warned him. That implied in McDowell's mind a cool and calculating premeditation,

the assumption that if Shan Tung was killed it would be in self-defense. And Keith's blood leaped to the thrill of it. He had not only found the depths of McDowell's personal interest in Miriam Kirkstone, but a last weapon had been placed in his hands, a weapon which he could use this day if it became necessary. Cornered, with no other hope of saving himself, he could as a last resort kill Shan Tung—and McDowell would stand behind him!

He went directly to Shan Tung's café and sauntered in. There were large changes in it since four years ago. The moment he passed through its screened vestibule, he felt its oriental exclusiveness, the sleek and mysterious quietness of it. One might have found such a place catering to the élite of a big city. It spoke sumptuously of a large expenditure of money, yet there was nothing bizarre or irritating to the senses. Its heavily-carved tables were almost oppressive in their solidity. Linen and silver, like Shan Tung himself, were immaculate. Magnificently embroidered screens were so cleverly arranged that one saw not all of the place at

once, but caught vistas of it. The few voices that Keith heard in this pre-lunch hour were subdued, and the speakers were concealed by screens. Two orientals, as immaculate as the silver and linen, were moving about with the silence of velvet-padded lynxes. A third, far in the rear, stood motionless as one of the carven tables, smoking a cigarette and watchful as a ferret. This was Li King, Shan Tung's right-hand man.

Keith approached him. When he was near enough, Li King gave the slightest inclination to his head and took the cigarette from his mouth. Without movement or speech he registered the question, "What do you want?"

Keith knew this to be a bit of oriental guile. In his mind there was no doubt that Li King had been fully instructed by his master and that he had been expecting him, even watching for him. Convinced of this, he gave him one of Conniston's cards and said,

"Take this to Shan Tung. He is expecting me."

Li King looked at the card, studied it

for a moment with apparent stupidity, and shook his head. "Shan Tung no home. Gone away."

That was all. Where he had gone or when he would return Keith could not discover from Li King. Of all other matters except that he had gone away the manager of Shan Tung's affairs was ignorant. Keith felt like taking the yellow-skinned hypocrite by the throat and choking something out of him, but he realized that Li King was studying and watching him, and that he would report to Shan Tung every expression that had passed over his face. So he looked at his watch, bought a cigar at the glass case near the cash register, and departed with a cheerful nod, saying that he would call again.

Ten minutes later he determined on a bold stroke. There was no time for indecision or compromise. He must find Shan Tung and find him quickly. And he believed that Miriam Kirkstone could give him a pretty good tip as to his whereabouts. He steeled himself to the demand he was about to make as he strode up to the house on the hill. He was disap-

pointed again. Miss Kirkstone was not at home. If she was, she did not answer to his knocking and bell ringing.

He went to the depot. No one he questioned had seen Shan Tung at the westbound train, the only train that had gone out that morning, and the agent emphatically disclaimed selling him a ticket. Therefore he had not gone far. Suspicion leaped red in Keith's brain. His imagination pictured Shan Tung at that moment with Miriam Kirkstone, and at the thought his disgust went out against them both. In this humor he returned to McDowell's office. He stood before his chief, leaning toward him over the desk table. This time he was the inquisitor.

"Plainly speaking, this liaison is their business," he declared. "Because he is yellow and she is white doesn't make it ours. I've just had a hunch. And I believe in following hunches, especially when one hits you good and hard, and this one has given me a jolt that means something. Where is that big fat brother of hers?"

McDowell hesitated. "It isn't a

liaison," he temporized. "It's one-sided —a crime against——"

"*Where is that big fat brother?*" With each word Keith emphasized his demand with a thud of his fist on the table. "*Where is he?*"

McDowell was deeply perturbed. Keith could see it and waited.

After a moment of silence the iron man rose from the swivel chair, walked to the window, gazed out for another moment, and walked back again, twisting one of his big gray mustaches in a way that betrayed the stress of his emotion. "Confound it, Conniston, you've got a mind for seeking out the trivialities, and little things are sometimes the most embarrassing."

"And sometimes most important," added Keith. "For instance, it strikes me as mighty important that we should know where Peter Kirkstone is and why he is not here fighting for his sister's salvation. Where is he?"

"I don't know. He disappeared from town a month ago. Miriam says he is somewhere in British Columbia looking

over some old mining properties. She doesn't know just where."

"And you believe her?"

The eyes of the two men met. There was no longer excuse for equivocation. Both understood.

McDowell smiled in recognition of the fact. "No. I think, Conniston, that she is the most wonderful little liar that lives. And the beautiful part of it is, she is lying for a purpose. Imagine Peter Kirkstone, who isn't worth the powder to blow him to Hades, interested in old mines or anything else that promises industry or production! And the most inconceivable thing about the whole mess is that Miriam worships that fat and worthless pig of a brother. I've tried to find him in British Columbia. Failed, of course. Another proof that this affair between Miriam and Shan Tung isn't a voluntary liaison on her part. She's lying. She's walking on a pavement of lies. If she told the truth——"

"There are some truths which one cannot tell about oneself," interrupted Keith. "They must be discovered or buried. And

I'm going deeper into this prospecting and undertaking business this afternoon. I've got another hunch. I think I'll have something interesting to report before night."

Ten minutes later, on his way to the Shack, he was discussing with himself the *modus operandi* of that "hunch." It had come to him in an instant, a flash of inspiration. That afternoon he would see Miriam Kirkstone and question her about Peter. Then he would return to McDowell, lay stress on the importance of the brother, tell him that he had a clew which he wanted to follow, and suggest finally a swift trip to British Columbia. He would take Mary Josephine, lie low until his term of service expired, and then report by letter to McDowell that he had failed and that he had made up his mind not to reënlist but to try his fortunes with Mary Josephine in Australia. Before McDowell received that letter, they could be on their way into the mountains. The "hunch" offered an opportunity for a clean getaway, and in his jubilation Miriam Kirkstone and her affairs were important only as a means to an end. He

was John Keith now, fighting for John Keith's life—and Derwent Conniston's sister.

Mary Josephine herself put the first shot into the fabric of his plans. She must have been watching for him, for when halfway up the slope he saw her coming to meet him. She scolded him for being away from her, as he had expected her to do. Then she pulled his arm about her slim little waist and held the hand thus engaged in both her own as they walked up the winding path. He noticed the little wrinkles in her adorable forehead.

"Derry, is it the right thing for young ladies to call on their gentlemen friends over here?" she asked suddenly.

"Why—er—that depends, Mary Josephine. You mean——"

"Yes, I do, Derwent Conniston! She's pretty, and I don't blame you, but I can't help feeling that I don't like it!"

His arm tightened about her until she gasped. The fragile softness of her waist was a joy to him.

"Derry!" she remonstrated. "If you do that again, I'll break!"

"I couldn't help it," he pleaded. "I couldn't, dear. The way you said it just made my arm close up tight. I'm glad you didn't like it. I can love only one at a time, and I'm loving you, and I'm going on loving you all my life."

"I wasn't jealous," she protested, blushing. "But she called twice on the telephone and then came up. And she's pretty."

"I suppose you mean Miss Kirkstone?"

"Yes. She was frightfully anxious to see you, Derry."

"And what did you think of her, dear?"

She cast a swift look up into his face. "Why, I like her. She's sweet and pretty, and I fell in love with her hair. But something was troubling her this morning. I'm quite sure of it, though she tried to keep it back."

"She was nervous, you mean, and pale, with sometimes a frightened look in her eyes. Was that it?"

"You seem to know, Derry. I think it was all that."

He nodded. He saw his horizon aglow with the smile of fortune. Everything

was coming propitiously for him, even this unexpected visit of Miriam Kirkstone. He did not trouble himself to speculate as to the object of her visit, for he was grappling now with his own opportunity, his chance to get away, to win out for himself in one last master-stroke, and his mind was concentrated in that direction. The time was ripe to tell these things to Mary Josephine. She must be prepared.

On the flat table of the hill where Brady had built his bungalow were scattered clumps of golden birch, and in the shelter of one of the nearer clumps was a bench, to which Keith drew Mary Josephine. Thereafter for many minutes he spoke his plans. Mary Josephine's cheeks grew flushed. Her eyes shone with excitement and eagerness. She thrilled to the story he told her of what they would do in those wonderful mountains of gold and mystery, just they two alone. He made her understand even more definitely that his safety and their mutual happiness depended upon the secrecy of their final project, that in a way they were conspirators and must act as such. They might start for the west

tonight or tomorow, and she must get ready.

There he should have stopped. But with Mary Josephine's warm little hand clinging to his and her beautiful eyes shining at him like liquid stars, he felt within him an overwhelming faith and desire, and he went on, making a clean breast of the situation that was giving them the opportunity to get away. He felt no prick of conscience at thought of Miriam Kirkstone's affairs. Her destiny must be, as he had told McDowell, largely a matter of her own choosing. Besides, she had McDowell to fight for her. And the big fat brother, too. So without fear of its effect he told Mary Josephine of the mysterious liaison between Miriam Kirkstone and Shan Tung, of McDowell's suspicions, of his own beliefs, and how it was all working out for their own good.

Not until then did he begin to see the changing lights in her eyes. Not until he had finished did he notice that most of that vivid flush of joy had gone from her face and that she was looking at him in a strained, tense way. He felt then the re-

action. She was not looking at the thing as he was looking at it. He had offered to her another woman's tragedy as *their* opportunity, and her own woman's heart had responded in the way that has been woman's since the dawn of life. A sense of shame which he fought and tried to crush took possession of him. He was right. He must be right, for it was his life that was hanging in the balance. Yet Mary Josephine could not know that.

Her fingers had tightened about his, and she was looking away from him. He saw now that the color had almost gone from her face. There was the flash of a new fire in her eyes.

"And *that* was why she was nervous and pale, with sometimes a frightened look in her eyes," she spoke softly, repeating his words. "It was because of this Chinese monster, Shan Tung—because he has some sort of power over her, you say—because——"

She snatched her hand from his with a suddenness that startled him. Her eyes, so beautiful and soft a few minutes before,

scintillated fire. "Derry, if you don't fix this heathen devil—*I will!*"

She stood up before him, breathing quickly, and he beheld in her not the soft, slim-waisted little goddess of half an hour ago, but the fiercest fighter of all the fighting ages, a woman roused. And no longer fear, but a glory swept over him. She was Conniston's sister, *and she was Conniston.* Even as he saw his plans falling about him, he opened his arms and held them out to her, and with the swiftness of love she ran into them, putting her hands to his face while he held her close and kissed her lips.

"You bet we'll fix that heathen devil before we go," he said. "You bet we will —*sweetheart!*"

XVIII

WALLIE, suffering the outrage of one who sees his dinner growing cold, found Keith and Mary Josephine in the edge of the golden birch and implored them to come and eat. It was a marvel of a dinner. Over Mary Josephine's coffee and Keith's cigar they discussed their final plans. Keith made the big promise that he would "fix Shan Tung" in a hurry, perhaps that very afternoon. In the glow of Mary Josephine's proud eyes he felt no task too large for him, and he was eager to be at it. But when his cigar was half done, Mary Josephine came around and perched herself on the arm of his chair, and began running her fingers through his hair. All desire to go after Shan Tung left him. He would have remained there forever. Twice she bent down and touched his forehead lightly with her lips. Again his arm was round her soft little waist, and his heart was pumping like a

thing overworked. It was Mary Josephine, finally, who sent him on his mission, but not before she stood on tiptoe, her hands on his shoulders, giving him her mouth to kiss.

An army at his back could not have strengthened Keith with a vaster determination than that kiss. There would be no more quibbling. His mind was made up definitely on the point. And his first move was to head straight for the Kirkstone house on the hill.

He did not get as far as the door this time. He caught a vision of Miriam Kirkstone in the shrubbery, bareheaded, her hair glowing radiantly in the sun. It occurred to him suddenly that it was her hair that roused the venom in him when he thought of her as the property of Shan Tung. If it had been black or even brown, the thought might not have emphasized itself so unpleasantly in his mind. But that vivid gold cried out against the crime, even against the girl herself. She saw him almost in the instant his eyes fell upon her, and came forward quickly to meet him. There was an eagerness in her face that

told him his coming relieved her of a terrific suspense.

"I'm sorry I wasn't at the Shack when you came, Miss Kirkstone," he said, taking for a moment the hand she offered him. "I fancy you were up there to see me about Shan Tung."

He sent the shot bluntly, straight home. In the tone of his voice there was no apology. He saw her grow cold, her eyes fixed on him staringly, as though she not only heard his words but saw what was in his mind.

"Wasn't that it, Miss Kirkstone?"

She nodded affirmatively, but her lips did not move.

"Shan Tung," he repeated. "Miss Kirkstone, what is the trouble? Why don't you confide in someone, in McDowell, in me, in——"

He was going to say "your brother," but the suddenness with which she caught his arm cut the words short.

"Shan Tung has been to see him—McDowell?" she questioned excitedly. "He has been there today? And he told him——" She stopped, breathing

quickly, her fingers tightening on his arm.

"I don't know what passed between them," said Keith. "But McDowell was tremendously worked up about you. So am I. We might as well be frank, Miss Kirkstone. There's something rotten in Denmark when two people like you and Shan Tung mix up. And you are mixed; you can't deny it. You have been to see Shan Tung late at night. He was in the house with you the first night I saw you. More than that—*he is in your house now!*"

She shrank back as if he had struck at her. "No, no, no," she cried. "He isn't there. I tell you, he isn't!"

"How am I to believe you?" demanded Keith. "You have not told the truth to McDowell. You are fighting to cover up the truth. And we know it is because of Shan Tung. *Why?* I am here to fight for you, to help you. And McDowell, too. That is why we must know. Miss Kirkstone, do you love the Chinaman?"

He knew the words were an insult. He had guessed their effect. As if struck there suddenly by a painter's brush, two vivid

spots appeared in the girl's pale cheeks. She shrank back from him another step. Her eyes blazed. Slowly, without turning their flame from his face, she pointed to the edge of the shrubbery a few feet from where they were standing. He looked. Twisted and partly coiled on the mold, where it had been clubbed to death, was a little green grass snake.

"I hate him—like that!" she said.

His eyes came back to her. "Then for some reason known only to you and Shan Tung you have sold or are intending to sell yourself to him!"

It was not a question. It was an accusation. He saw the flush of anger fading out of her cheeks. Her body relaxed, her head dropped, and slowly she nodded in confirmation.

"Yes, I am going to sell myself to him."

The astounding confession held him mute for a space. In the interval it was the girl who became self-possessed. What she said next amazed him still more.

"I have confessed so much because I am positive that you will not betray me. And I went up to the Shack to find you,

because I want you to help me find a story to tell McDowell. You said you would help me. Will you?"

He still did not speak, and she went on.

"I am accepting that promise as granted, too. McDowell mistrusts, but he must not know. You must help me there. You must help me for two or three weeks. At the end of that time something may happen. He must be made to have faith in me again. Do you understand?"

"Partly," said Keith. "You ask me to do this blindly, without knowing why I am doing it, without any explanation whatever on your part except that for some unknown and mysterious price you are going to sell yourself to Shan Tung. You want me to cover and abet this monstrous deal by hoodwinking the man whose suspicions threaten its consummation. If there was not in my own mind a suspicion that you are insane, I should say your proposition is as ludicrous as it is impossible. Having that suspicion, it is a bit tragic. Also it is impossible. It is necessary for you first to tell me why you are going to sell yourself to Shan Tung."

Her face was coldly white and calm again. But her hands trembled. He saw her try to hide them, and pitied her.

"Then I won't trouble you any more, for that, too, is impossible," she said. "May I trust you to keep in confidence what I have told you? Perhaps I have had too much faith in you for a reason which has no reason, because you were with John Keith. John Keith was the one other man who might have helped me."

"And why John Keith? How could he have helped you?"

She shook her head. "If I told you that, I should be answering the question which is impossible."

He saw himself facing a checkmate. To plead, to argue with her, he knew would profit him nothing. A new thought came to him, swift and imperative. The end would justify the means. He clenched his hands. He forced into his face a look that was black and vengeful. And he turned it on her.

"Listen to me," he cried. "You are playing a game, and so am I. Possibly we are selfish, both of us, looking each to his

own interests with no thought of the other. Will you help me, if I help you?"

Again he pitied her as he saw with what eager swiftness she caught at his bait.

"Yes," she nodded, catching her breath. "Yes, I will help you."

His face grew blacker. He raised his clenched hands so she could see them, and advanced a step toward her.

"Then tell me this—would you care if something happened to Shan Tung? Would you care if he died, if he was killed, if——"

Her breath was coming faster and faster. Again the red spots blazed in her cheeks.

"*Would you care?*" he demanded.

"No—no—I wouldn't care. He deserves to die."

"Then tell me where Shan Tung is. For my game is with him. And I believe it is a bigger game than your game, for it is a game of life and death. That is why I am interested in your affair. It is because I am selfish, because I have my own score to settle, and because you can help me. I shall ask you no more questions about yourself. And I shall keep your

secret and help you with McDowell if you will keep mine and help me. First, where is Shan Tung?"

She hesitated for barely an instant. "He has gone out of town. He will be away for ten days."

"But he bought no ticket; no one saw him leave by train."

"No, he walked up the river. An auto was waiting for him. He will pass through tonight on the eastbound train on his way to Winnipeg."

"Will you tell me why he is going to Winnipeg?"

"No, I cannot."

He shrugged his shoulders. "It is scarcely necessary to ask. I can guess. It is to see your brother."

Again he knew he had struck home. And yet she said,

"No, it is not to see my brother."

He held out his hand to her. "Miss Kirkstone, I am going to keep my promise. I am going to help you with McDowell. Of course I demand my price. Will you swear on your word of honor to let me know the moment Shan Tung returns?"

"I will let you know."

Their hands clasped. Looking into her eyes, Keith saw what told him his was not the greatest cross to bear. Miriam Kirkstone also was fighting for her life, and as he turned to leave her, he said:

"While there is life there is hope. In settling my score with Shan Tung I believe that I shall also settle yours. It is a strong hunch, Miss Kirkstone, and it's holding me tight. Ten days, Shan Tung, and then——"

He left her, smiling. Miriam Kirkstone watched him go, her slim hands clutched at her breast, her eyes aglow with a new thought, a new hope; and as he heard the gate slam behind him, a sobbing cry rose in her throat, and she reached out her hands as if to call him back, for something was telling her that through this man lay the way to her salvation.

And her lips were moaning softly, "Ten days—ten days—and then—what?"

XIX

IN those ten days all the wonders of June came up out of the south. Life pulsed with a new and vibrant force. The crimson fire-flowers, first of wild blooms to come after snow and frost, splashed the green spaces with red. The forests took on new colors, the blue of the sky grew nearer, and in men's veins the blood ran with new vigor and anticipations. To Keith they were all this and more. Four years along the rim of the Arctic had made it possible for him to drink to the full the glory of early summer along the Saskatchewan. And to Mary Josephine it was all new. Never had she seen a summer like this that was dawning, that most wonderful of all the summers in the world, which comes in June along the southern edge of the Northland.

Keith had played his promised part. It was not difficult for him to wipe away

the worst of McDowell's suspicions regarding Miss Kirkstone, for McDowell was eager to believe. When Keith told him that Miriam was on the verge of a nervous breakdown simply because of certain trouble into which Shan Tung had inveigled her brother, and that everything would be straightened out the moment Shan Tung returned from Winnipeg, the iron man seized his hands in a sudden burst of relief and gratitude.

"But why didn't she confide in me, Conniston?" he complained. "Why didn't she confide in me?" The anxiety in his voice, its note of disappointment, were almost boyish.

Keith was prepared. "Because——" He hesitated, as if projecting the thing in his mind. "McDowell, I'm in a delicate position. You must understand without forcing me to say too much. You are the last man in the world Miss Kirkstone wants to know about her trouble until she has triumphed, and it is over. Delicacy, perhaps; a woman's desire to keep something she is ashamed of from the one man she looks up to above all other men—to

keep it away from him until she has cleared herself so that there is no suspicion. McDowell, if I were you, I'd be proud of her for that."

McDowell turned away, and for a space Keith saw the muscles in the back of his neck twitching.

"Derwent, maybe you've guessed, maybe you understand," he said after a moment with his face still turned to the window. "Of course she will never know. I'm too old, old enough to be her father. But I've got the right to watch over her, and if any man ever injures her——"

His fists grew knotted, and softly Keith said behind him:

"You'd possibly do what John Keith did to the man who wronged his father. And because the Law is not always omniscient, it is also possible that Shan Tung may have to answer in some such way. Until then, until she comes to you of her own free will and with gladness in her eyes tells you her own secret and why she kept it from you—until she does that, I say, it is your part to treat her as if you had seen nothing, guessed nothing, suspected

nothing. Do that, McDowell, and leave the rest to me."

He went out, leaving the iron man still with his face to the window.

With Mary Josephine there was no subterfuge. His mind was still centered in his own happiness. He could not wipe out of his brain the conviction that if he waited for Shan Tung he was waiting just so long under the sword of Damocles, with a hair between him and doom. He hoped that Miriam Kirkstone's refusal to confide in him and her reluctance to furnish him with the smallest facts in the matter would turn Mary Josephine's sympathy into a feeling of indifference if not of actual resentment. He was disappointed. Mary Josephine insisted on having Miss Kirkstone over for dinner the next day, and from that hour something grew between the two girls which Keith knew he was powerless to overcome. Thereafter he bowed his head to fate. He must wait for Shan Tung.

"If it wasn't for your promise not to fall in love, I'd be afraid," Mary Josephine confided to him that night, perched

on the arm of his big chair. "At times I was afraid today, Derry. She's lovely. And you like pretty hair—and hers—is wonderful!"

"I don't remember," said Keith quietly, "that I promised you I wouldn't fall in love. I'm desperately in love, and with you, Mary Josephine. And as for Miss Kirkstone's lovely hair—I wouldn't trade one of yours for all she has on her head."

At that, with a riotous little laugh of joy, Mary Josephine swiftly unbound her hair and let it smother about his face and shoulders. "Sometimes I have a terribly funny thought, Derry," she whispered. "If we hadn't always been sweethearts, back there at home, and if you hadn't always liked my hair, and kissed me, and told me I was pretty, I'd almost think you weren't my brother!"

Keith laughed and was glad that her hair covered his face.

During those wonderful first days of the summer they were inseparable, except when matters of business took Keith away. During these times he prepared for eventualities. The Keith properties in Prince

Albert, he estimated, were worth at least a hundred thousand dollars, and he learned from McDowell that they would soon go through a process of law before being turned over to his fortunate inheritors. Before that time, however, he knew that his own fate would be sealed one way or the other, and now that he had Mary Josephine to look after, he made a will, leaving everything to her, and signing himself John Keith. This will he carried in an envelope pinned inside his shirt. As Derwent Conniston he collected one thousand two hundred and sixty dollars for three and a half years back wage in the Service. Two hundred and sixty of this he kept in his own pocket. The remaining thousand he counted out in new hundred-dollar bills under Mary Josephine's eyes, sealed the bills in another envelope, and gave the envelope to her.

"It's safer with you than with me," he excused himself. "Fasten it inside your dress. It's our grub-stake into the mountains."

Mary Josephine accepted the treasure with the repressed delight of one upon

whose fair shoulders had been placed a tremendous responsibility.

There were days of both joy and pain for Keith. For even in the fullest hours of his happiness there was a thing eating at his heart, a thing that was eating deeper and deeper until at times it was like a destroying flame within him. One night he dreamed; he dreamed that Conniston came to his bedside and wakened him, and that after wakening him he taunted him in ghoulish glee and told him that in bequeathing him a sister he had given unto him forever and forever the curse of the daughters of Achelous. And Keith, waking in the dark hour of night, knew in his despair that it was so. For all time, even though he won this fight he was fighting, Mary Josephine would be the unattainable. A sister—and he loved her with the love of a man!

It was the next day after the dream that they wandered again into the grove that sheltered Keith's old home, and again they entered it and went through the cold and empty rooms. In one of these rooms he sought among the titles of dusty rows

of books until he came to one and opened it. And there he found what had been in the corner of his mind when the sun rose to give him courage after the night of his dream. The daughters of Achelous had lost in the end. Ulysses had tricked them. Ulysses had won. And in this day and age it was up to him, John Keith, to win, and win he would!

Always he felt this mastering certainty of the future when alone with Mary Josephine in the open day. With her at his side, her hand in his, and his arm about her waist, he told himself that all life was a lie—that there was no earth, no sun, no song or gladness in all the world, if that world held no hope for him. It was there. It was beyond the rim of forest. It was beyond the yellow plains, beyond the farthest timber of the farthest prairie, beyond the foothills; in the heart of the mountains was its abiding place. As he had dreamed of those mountains in boyhood and youth, so now he dreamed his dreams over again with Mary Josephine. For her he painted his pictures of them, as they wandered mile after mile up the

shore of the Saskatchewan—the little world they would make all for themselves, how they would live, what they would do, the mysteries they would seek out, the triumphs they would achieve, the glory of that world—just for two. And Mary Josephine planned and dreamed with him.

In a week they lived what might have been encompassed in a year. So it seemed to Keith, who had known her only so long. With Mary Josephine the view-point was different. There had been a long separation, a separation filled with a heartbreak which she would never forget, but it had not served to weaken the bonds between her and this loved one, who, she thought, had always been her own. To her their comradeship was more complete now than it ever had been, even back in the old days, for they were alone in a land that was strange to her, and one was all that the world held for the other. So her possessorship of Keith was a thing which—again in the dark and brooding hours of night—sometimes made him writhe in an agony of shame. Hers was a shameless love, a love which had not even the lover's reason for

embarrassment, a love unreserved and open as the day. It was her trick, nights, to nestle herself in the big armchair with him, and it was her fun to smother his face in her hair and tumble it about him, piling it over his mouth and nose until she made him plead for air. Again she would fit herself comfortably in the hollow of his arm and sit the evening out with her head on his shoulder, while they planned their future, and twice in that week she fell asleep there. Each morning she greeted him with a kiss, and each night she came to him to be kissed, and when it was her pleasure she kissed him—or made him kiss her—when they were on their long walks. It was bitter-sweet to Keith, and more frequently came the hours of crushing desolation for him, those hours in the still, dark night when his hypocrisy and his crime stood out stark and hideous in his troubled brain.

As this thing grew in him, a black and foreboding thunderstorm on the horizon of his dreams, an impulse which he did not resist dragged him more and more frequently down to the old home, and Mary

Josephine was always with him. They let no one know of these visits. And they talked about John Keith, and in Mary Josephine's eyes he saw more than once a soft and starry glow of understanding. She loved the memory of this man because he, her brother, had loved him. And after these hours came the nights when truth, smiling at him, flung aside its mask and stood a grinning specter, and he measured to the depths the falseness of his triumph. His comfort was the thought that she knew. Whatever happened, she would know what John Keith had been. For he, John Keith, had told her. So much of the truth had he lived.

He fought against the new strain that was descending upon him slowly and steadily as the days passed. He could not but see the new light that had grown in Miriam Kirkstone's eyes. At times it was more than a dawn of hope. It was almost certainty. She had faith in him, faith in his promise to her, in his power to fight, his strength to win. Her growing friendship with Mary Josephine accentuated this, inspiring her at times almost to a point of

conviction, for Mary Josephine's confidence in him was a passion. Even McDowell, primarily a fighter of his own battles, cautious and suspicious, had faith in him while he waited for Shan Tung. It was this blind belief in him that depressed him more than all else, for he knew that victory for himself must be based more or less on deceit and treachery. For the first time he heard Miriam laugh with Mary Josephine; he saw the gold and the brown head together out in the sun; he saw her face shining with a light that he had never seen there before, and then, when he came upon them, their faces were turned to him, and his heart bled even as he smiled and held out his hands to Mary Josephine. They trusted him, and he was a liar, a hypocrite, a Pharisee.

On the ninth day he had finished supper with Mary Josephine when the telephone rang. He rose to answer it. It was Miriam Kirkstone.

"He has returned," she said.

That was all. The words were in a choking voice. He answered and hung up the receiver. He knew a change had come

into his face when he turned to Mary Josephine. He steeled himself to a composure that drew a questioning tenseness into her face. Gently he stroked her soft hair, explaining that Shan Tung had returned and that he was going to see him. In his bedroom he strapped his Service automatic under his coat.

At the door, ready to go, he paused. Mary Josephine came to him and put her hands to his shoulders. A strange unrest was in her eyes, a question which she did not ask.

Something whispered to him that it was the last time. Whatever happened now, tonight must leave him clean. His arms went around her, he drew her close against his breast, and for a space he held her there, looking into her eyes.

"You love me?" he asked softly.

"More than anything else in the world," she whispered.

"Kiss me, Mary Josephine."

Her lips pressed to his.

He released her from his arms, slowly, lingeringly.

After that she stood in the lighted door-

way, watching him, until he disappeared in the gloom of the slope. She called good-by, and he answered her. The door closed. And he went down into the valley, a hand of foreboding gripping at his heart.

XX

WITH a face out of which all color had fled, and eyes filled with the ghosts of a new horror, Miriam Kirkstone stood before Keith in the big room in the house on the hill.

"He was here—ten minutes," she said, and her voice was as if she was forcing it out of a part of her that was dead and cold. It was lifeless, emotionless, a living voice and yet strange with the chill of death. "In those ten minutes he told me —that! If you fail——"

It was her throat that held him, fascinated him. White, slim, beautiful—her heart seemed pulsing there. And he could see that heart choke back the words she was about to speak.

"If I fail——" he repeated the words slowly after her, watching that white, beating throat.

"There is only the one thing left for me to do. You—you—understand?"

"Yes, I understand. Therefore I shall not fail."

He backed away from her toward the door, and still he could not take his eyes from the white throat with its beating heart. "I shall not fail," he repeated. "And when the telephone rings, you will be here—to answer?"

"Yes, here," she replied huskily.

He went out. Under his feet the gravelly path ran through a flood of moonlight. Over him the sky was agleam with stars. It was a white night, one of those wonderful gold-white nights in the land of the Saskatchewan. Under that sky the world was alive. The little city lay in a golden glimmer of lights. Out of it rose a murmur, a rippling stream of sound, the voice of its life, softened by the little valley between. Into it Keith descended. He passed men and women, laughing, talking, gay. He heard music. The main street was a moving throng. On a corner the Salvation Army, a young woman, a young man, a crippled boy, two young girls, and an old man, were singing "Nearer, My God, to Thee." Opposite

the Board of Trade building on the edge of the river a street medicine-fakir had drawn a crowd to his wagon. To the beat of the Salvation Army's tambourine rose the thrum of a made-up negro's banjo.

Through these things Keith passed, his eyes open, his ears listening, but he passed swiftly. What he saw and what he heard pressed upon him with the chilling thrill of that last swan-song, the swan-song of Ecla, of Kobat, of Ty, who had heard their doom chanted from the mountain-tops. It was the city rising up about his ears in rejoicing and triumph. And it put in his heart a cold, impassive anger. He sensed an impending doom. and yet he was not afraid. He was no longer chained by dreams, no more restrained by self. Before his eyes, beating, beating, beating, he saw that tremulous heart in Miriam Kirkstone's soft, white throat.

He came to Shan Tung's. Beyond the softly curtained windows it was a yellow glare of light. He entered and met the flow of life, the murmur of voices and laughter, the tinkle of glasses, the scent of cigarette smoke, and the fainter perfume

of incense. And where he had seen him last, as though he had not moved since that hour nine days ago, still with his cigarette, still sphinx-like, narrow-eyed, watchful, stood Li King.

Keith walked straight to him. And this time, as he approached, Li King greeted him with a quick and subtle smile. He flipped his cigarette to the tiled floor. He was bowing, gracious. Tonight he was not stupid.

"I have come to see Shan Tung," said Keith.

He had half expected to be refused, in which event he was prepared to use his prerogative as an officer of the law to gain his point. But Li King did not hesitate. He was almost eager. And Keith knew that Shan Tung was expecting him.

They passed behind one of the screens and then behind another, until it seemed to Keith their way was a sinuous twisting among screens. They paused before a panel in the wall, and Li King pressed the black throat of a long-legged, swan-necked bird with huge wings and the panel opened and swung toward them. It was dark in-

side, but Li King turned on a light. through a narrow hallway ten feet in length he led the way, unlocked a second door, and held it open, smiling at Keith.

"Up there," he said.

A flight of steps led upward and as Keith began to mount them the door closed softly behind him. Li King accompanied him no further.

He mounted the steps, treading softly. At the top was another door, and this he opened as quietly as Li King had closed the one below him. Again the omnipresent screens, and then his eyes looked out upon a scene which made him pause in astonishment. It was a great room, a room fifty feet long by thirty in width, and never before had he beheld such luxury as it contained. His feet sank into velvet carpets, the walls were hung richly with the golds and browns and crimsons of priceless tapestries, and carven tables and divans of deep plush and oriental chairs filled the space before him. At the far end was a raised dais, and before this, illumined in candle-glow, was a kneeling figure. He noticed then that there were many candles burning,

that the room was lighted by candles, and that in their illumination the figure did not move. He caught the glint of armors standing up, warrior like, against the tapestries, and he wondered for a moment if the kneeling figure was a heathen god made of wood. It was then that he smelled the odor of frankincense; it crept subtly into his nostrils and his mouth, sweetened his breath, and made him cough.

At the far end, before the dais, the kneeling figure began to move. Its arms extended slowly, they swept backward, then out again, and three times the figure bowed itself and straightened, and with the movement came a low, human monotone. It was over quickly. Probably two full minutes had not passed since Keith had entered when the kneeling figure sprang to its feet with the quickness of a cat, faced about, and stood there, smiling and bowing and extending its hand.

"Good evening, John Keith!" It was Shan Tung. An oriental gown fell about him, draping him like a woman. It was a crimson gown, grotesquely ornamented

with embroidered peacocks, and it flowed and swept about him in graceful undulations as he advanced, his footfalls making not the sound of a mouse on the velvet floors.

"Good evening, John Keith!" He was close, smiling, his eyes glowing, his hand still outstretched, friendliness in his voice and manner. And yet in that voice there was a purr, the purr of a cat watching its prey, and in his eyes a glow that was the soft rejoicing of a triumph.

Keith did not take the hand. He made as if he did not see it. He was looking into those glowing, confident eyes of the Chinaman. A Chinaman! Was it possible? Could a Chinaman possess that voice, whose very perfection shamed him?

Shan Tung seemed to read his thoughts. And what he found amused him, and he bowed again, still smiling. "I am Shan Tung," he said with the slightest inflection of irony. "Here—in my home—I am different. Do you not recognize me?"

He waved gracefully a hand toward a table on either side of which was a chair. He seated himself, not waiting for Keith.

Keith sat down opposite him. Again he must have read what was in Keith's heart, the desire and the intent to kill, for suddenly he clapped his hands, not loudly, once—twice——

"You will join me in tea?" he asked.

Scarcely had he spoken when about them, on all sides of them it seemed to Keith, there was a rustle of life. He saw tapestries move. Before his eyes a panel became a door. There was a clicking, a stir as of gowns, soft footsteps, a movement in the air. Out of the panel doorway came a Chinaman with a cloth, napkins, and chinaware. Behind him followed a second with tea-urn and a bowl, and with the suddenness of an apparition, without sound or movement, a third was standing at Keith's side. And still there was rustling behind, still there was the whispering beat of life, and Keith knew that there were others. He did not flinch, but smiled back at Shan Tung. A minute, no more, and the soft-footed yellow men had performed their errands and were gone.

"Quick service," he acknowledged. "*Very* quick service, Shan Tung! But I

have my hand on something that is quicker!"

Suddenly Shan Tung leaned over the table. "John Keith, you are a fool if you came here with murder in your heart," he said. "Let us be friends. It is best. Let us be friends."

XXI

IT was as if with a swiftness invisible to the eye a mask had dropped from Shan Tung's face. Keith, preparing to fight, urging himself on to the step which he believed he must take, was amazed. Shan Tung was earnest. There was more than earnestness in his eyes, an anxiety, a frankly revealed hope that Keith would meet him halfway. But he did not offer his hand again. He seemed to sense, in that instant, the vast gulf between yellow and white. He felt Keith's contempt, the spurning contumely that was in the other's mind. Under the pallid texture of his skin there began to burn a slow and growing flush.

"Wait!" he said softly. In his flowing gown he seemed to glide to a carven desk near at hand. He was back in a moment with a roll of parchment in his hand. He sat down again and met Keith's eyes

squarely and in silence for a moment. "We are both *men,* John Keith." His voice was soft and calm. His tapering fingers with their carefully manicured nails fondled the roll of parchment, and then unrolled it, and held it so the other could read.

It was a university diploma. Keith stared. A strange name was scrolled upon it, Kao Lung, Prince of Shantung. His mind leaped to the truth. He looked at the other.

The man he had known as Shan Tung met his eyes with a quiet, strange smile, a smile in which there was pride, a flash of sovereignty, of a thing greater than skins that were white. "I am Prince Kao," he said. "That is my diploma. I am a graduate of Yale."

Keith's effort to speak was merely a grunt. He could find no words. And Kao, rolling up the parchment and forgetting the urn of tea that was growing cold, leaned a little over the table again. And then it was, deep in his narrowed, smoldering eyes, that Keith saw a devil, a living, burning thing of passion, Kao's

soul itself. And Kao's voice was quiet, deadly.

"I recognized you in McDowell's office," he said. "I saw, first, that you were not Derwent Conniston. And then it was easy, so easy. Perhaps you killed Conniston. I am not asking, for I hated Conniston. Some day I should have killed him, if he had come back. John Keith, from that first time we met, you were a dead man. Why didn't I turn you over to the hangman? Why did I warn you in such a way that I knew you would come to see me? Why did I save your life which was in the hollow of my hand? Can you guess?"

"Partly," replied Keith. "But go on. I am waiting." Not for an instant did it enter his mind to deny that he was John Keith. Denial was folly, a waste of time, and just now he felt that nothing in the world was more precious to him than time.

Kao's quick mind, scheming and treacherous though it was, caught his view-point, and he nodded appreciatively. "Good, John Keith. It is easily guessed. Your life is mine. I can save it. I can destroy

it. And you, in turn, can be of service to me. You help me, and I save you. It is a profitable arrangement. And we both are happy, for you keep Derwent Conniston's sister—and I—I get my golden-headed goddess, Miriam Kirkstone!"

"That much I have guessed," said Keith. "Go on!" For a moment Kao seemed to hesitate, to study the cold, gray passiveness of the other's face. "You love Derwent Conniston's sister," he continued in a voice still lower and softer. "And I—I love my golden-headed goddess. See! Up there on the dais I have her picture and a tress of her golden hair, and I worship them."

Colder and grayer was Keith's face as he saw the slumbering passion burn fiercer in Kao's eyes. It turned him sick. It was a terrible thing which could not be called love. It was a madness. But Kao, the man himself, was not mad. He was a monster. And while the eyes burned like two devils, his voice was still soft and low.

"I know what you are thinking; I see what you are seeing," he said. "You are thinking yellow, and you are seeing yellow.

My skin! My birthright! My——" He smiled, and his voice was almost caressing. "John Keith, in Pe-Chi-Li is the great city of Pekin, and Pe-Chi-Li is the greatest province in all China. And second only to that is the province of Shantung, which borders Pe-Chi-Li, the home of our Emperors for more centuries than you have years. And for so many generations that we cannot remember my forefathers have been rulers of Shantung. My grandfather was a Mandarin with the insignia of the Eighth Order, and my father was Ninth and highest of all Orders, with his palace at Tsi-Nan, on the Yellow Sea. And I, Prince Kao, eldest of his sons, came to America to learn American law and American ways. And I learned them, John Keith. I returned, and with my knowledge I undermined a government. For a time I was in power, and then this thing you call the god of luck turned against me, and I fled for my life. But the blood is still here—" he put his hand softly to his breast, "—the blood of a hundred generations of rulers. I tell you this because you dare not betray me, you dare not tell them who

I am, though even that truth could not harm me. I prefer to be known as Shan Tung. Only you—and Miriam Kirkstone—have heard as much."

Keith's blood was like fire, but his voice was cold as ice. *"Go on!"*

This time there could be no mistake. That cold gray of his passionless face, the steely glitter in his eyes, were read correctly by Kao. His eyes narrowed. For the first time a dull flame leaped into his colorless cheeks.

"Ah, I told you this because I thought we would work together, friends," he cried. "But it is not so. You, like my golden-headed goddess, hate me! You hate me because of my yellow skin. You say to yourself that I have a yellow heart. And she hates me, and she says that—but she is mine, *mine!*" He sprang suddenly to his feet and swept about him with his flowing arms. "See what I have prepared for her! It is here she will come, here she will live until I take her away. There, on that dais, she will give up her soul and her beautiful body to me—and you cannot help it, she cannot help it, all the

world cannot help it—*and she is coming to me tonight!*"

"*Tonight!*" gasped John Keith.

He, too, leaped to his feet. His face was ghastly. And Kao, in his silken gown, was sweeping his arms about him.

"See! The candles are lighted for her. They are waiting. And tonight, when the town is asleep, she will come. *And it is you who will make her come, John Keith!*"

Facing the devils in Kao's eyes, within striking distance of a creature who was no longer a man but a monster, Keith marveled at the coolness that held him back.

"Yes, it is you who will at last give her soul and her beautiful body to me," he repeated. "Come. I will show you how —and why!"

He glided toward the dais. His hand touched a panel. It opened and in the opening he turned about and waited for Keith.

"Come!" he said.

Keith, drawing a deep breath, his soul ready for the shock, his body ready for action, followed him.

XXII

INTO a narrow corridor, through a second door that seemed made of padded wool, and then into a dimly lighted room John Keith followed Kao, the Chinaman. Out of this room there was no other exit; it was almost square, its ceiling was low, its walls darkly somber, and that life was there Keith knew by the heaviness of cigarette smoke in the air. For a moment his eyes did not discern the physical evidence of that life. And then, staring at him out of the yellow glow, he saw a face. It was a haunting, terrible face, a face heavy and deeply lined by sagging flesh and with eyes sunken and staring. They were more than staring. They greeted Keith like living coals. Under the face was a human form, a big, fat, sagging form that leaned outward from its seat in a chair.

Kao, bowing, sweeping his flowing rai-

ment with his arms, said, "John Keith, allow me to introduce you to Peter Kirkstone."

For the first time amazement, shock, came to Keith's lips in an audible cry. He advanced a step. Yes, in that pitiable wreck of a man he recognized Peter Kirkstone, the fat creature who had stood under the picture of the Madonna that fateful night, Miriam Kirkstone's brother!

And as he stood, speechless, Kao said: "Peter Kirkstone, you know why I have brought this man to you tonight. You know that he is not Derwent Conniston. You know that he is John Keith, the murderer of your father. Is it not so?"

The thick lips moved. The voice was husky—"Yes."

"He does not believe. So I have brought him that he may listen to you. Peter Kirkstone, is it your desire that your sister, Miriam, give herself to me, Prince Kao, tonight?"

Again the thick lips moved. This time Keith saw the effort. He shuddered. He knew these questions and answers had been prepared. A doomed man was speaking.

And the voice came, choking, "Yes."

"Why?"

The terrible face of Peter Kirkstone seemed to contort. He looked at Kao. And Kao's eyes were shining in that dull room like the eyes of a snake.

"Because—it will save my life."

"And why will it save your life?"

Again that pause, again the sickly, choking effort. "Because—*I have killed a man.*"

Bowing, smiling, rustling, Kao turned to the door. "That is all, Peter Kirkstone. Good night. John Keith, will you follow me?"

Dumbly Keith followed through the dark corridor, into the big room mellow with candle-glow, back to the table with its mocking tea-urn and chinaware. He felt a thing like clammy sweat on his back. He sat down. And Kao sat opposite him again.

"That is the reason, John Keith. Peter Kirkstone, her brother, is a murderer, a cold-blooded murderer. And only Miriam Kirkstone and your humble servant, Prince Kao, know his secret. And to buy my

et, to save his life, the golden-headed dess is almost ready to give herself to —almost, John Keith. She will decide ght, when you go to her. She will e. Yes, she will come tonight. I do fear. I have prepared for her the les, the bridal dais, the nuptial supper. she will come. For if she does not, if she fails, with tomorrow's dawn Peter Kirkstone and John Keith both go to the hangman!"

Keith, in spite of the horror that had come over him, felt no excitement. The whole situation was clear to him now, and there was nothing to be gained by argument, no possibility of evasion. Kao held the winning hand, the hand that put his back to the wall in the face of impossible alternatives. These alternatives flashed upon him swiftly. There were two and only two—flight, and alone, without Mary Josephine; and betrayal of Miriam Kirkstone. Just how Kao schemed that he should accomplish that betrayal, he could not guess.

His voice, like his face, was cold and strange when it answered the Chinaman;

it lacked passion; there was no emphasis, no inflection that gave to one word more than to another. And Keith, listening to his own voice, knew what it meant. He was cold inside, cold as ice, and his eyes were on the dais, the sacrificial altar that Kao had prepared, waiting in the candle-glow. On the floor of that dais was a great splash of dull-gold altar cloth, and it made him think of Miriam Kirkstone's unbound and disheveled hair strewn in its outraged glory over the thing Kao had prepared for her.

"I see. It is a trade, Kao. You are offering me my life in return for Miriam Kirkstone."

"More than that, John Keith. Mine is the small price. And yet it is great to me, for it gives me the golden goddess. But is she more to me than Derwent Conniston's sister may be to you? Yes, I am giving you her, and I am giving you your life, and I am giving Peter Kirkstone his life —all for *one*."

"For one," repeated Keith.

"Yes, for one."

"And I, John Keith, in some mysterious

way unknown to me at present, am to deliver Miriam Kirkstone to you?"

"Yes."

"And yet, if I should kill you, now—where you sit——"

Kao shrugged his slim shoulders, and Keith heard that soft, gurgling laugh that McDowell had said was like the splutter of oil.

"I have arranged. It is all in writing. If anything should happen to me, there are messengers who would carry it swiftly To harm me would be to seal your own doom. Besides, you would not leave here alive. I am not afraid."

"How am I to deliver Miriam Kirkstone to you?"

Kao leaned forward, his fingers interlacing eagerly. "Ah, *now* you have asked the question, John Keith! And we shall be friends, great friends, for you see with the eyes of wisdom. It will be easy, so easy that you will wonder at the cheapness of the task. Ten days ago Miriam Kirkstone was about to pay my price. And then you came. From that moment she saw you in McDowell's office, there was a sudden

change. Why? I don't know. Perhaps because of that thing you call intuition but to which we give a greater name. Perhaps only because you were the man who had run down her father's murderer. I saw her that afternoon, before you went up at night. Ah, yes, I could see, I could understand the spark that had begun to grow in her, hope, a wild, impossible hope, and I prepared for it by leaving you my message. I went away. I knew that in a few days all that hope would be centered in you, that it would live and die in you, that in the end it would be your word that would bring her to me. And that word you must speak tonight. You must go to her, hope-broken. You must tell her that no power on earth can save her, and that Kao waits to make her a princess, that tomorrow will be too late, that *tonight* must the bargain be closed. She will come. She will save her brother from the hangman, and you, in bringing her, will save John Keith and keep Derwent Conniston's sister. Is it not a great reward for the little I am asking?"

It was Keith who now smiled into the

eyes of the Chinaman, but it was a smile that did not soften that gray and rock-like hardness that had settled in his face. "Kao, you are a devil. I suppose that is a compliment to your dirty ears. You're rotten to the core of the thing that beats in you like a heart; you're a yellow snake from the skin in. I came to see you because I thought there might be a way out of this mess. I had almost made up my mind to kill you. But I won't do that. There's a better way. In half an hour I'll be with McDowell, and I'll beat you out by telling him that I'm John Keith. And I'll tell him this story of Miriam Kirkstone from beginning to end. I'll tell him of that dais you've built for her—your sacrificial altar!—and tomorrow Prince Albert will rise to a man to drag you out of this hole and kill you as they would kill a rat. That is my answer, you slit-eyed, Yale-veneered yellow devil! I may die, and Peter Kirkstone may die, but you'll not get Miriam Kirkstone!"

He was on his feet when he finished, amazed at the calmness of his own voice, amazed that his hands were steady and his

brain was cool in this hour of his sacrifice. And Kao was stunned. Before his eyes he saw a white man throwing away his life. Here, in the final play, was a master-stroke he had not foreseen. A moment before the victor, he was now the vanquished. About him he saw his world falling, his power gone, his own life suddenly hanging by a thread. In Keith's face he read the truth. This white man was not bluffing. He would go to McDowell. He would tell the truth. This man who had ventured so much for his own life and freedom would now sacrifice that life to save a girl, one girl! He could not understand, and yet he believed. For it was there before his eyes in that gray, passionless face that was as inexorable as the face of one of his own stone gods.

As he uttered the words that smashed all that Kao had planned for, Keith sensed rather than saw the swift change of emotion sweeping through the yellow-visaged Moloch staring up at him. For a space the oriental's evil eyes had widened, exposing wider rims of saffron white, betraying his amazement, the shock of Keith's unex-

pected revolt, and then the lids closed slowly, until only dark and menacing gleams of fire shot between them, and Keith thought of the eyes of a snake. Swift as the strike of a rattler Kao was on his feet, his gown thrown back, one clawing hand jerking a derringer from his silken belt. In the same breath he raised his voice in a sharp call.

Keith sprang back. The snake-like threat in the Chinaman's eyes had prepared him, and his Service automatic leaped from its holster with lightning swiftness. Yet that movement was no swifter than the response to Kao's cry. The panel shot open, the screens moved, tapestries billowed suddenly as if moved by the wind, and Kao's servants sprang forth and were at him like a pack of dogs. Keith had no time to judge their number, for his brain was centered in the race with Kao's derringer. He saw its silver mountings flash in the candle-glow, saw its spurt of smoke and fire. But its report was drowned in the roar of his automatic as it replied with a stream of lead and flame. He saw the derringer fall and Kao

crumple up like a jackknife. His brain turned red as he swung his weapon on the others, and as he fired, he backed toward the door. Then something caught him from behind, twisting his head almost from his shoulders, and he went down.

He lost his automatic. Weight of bodies was upon him; yellow hands clutched for his throat; he felt hot breaths and heard throaty cries. A madness of horror possessed him, a horror that was like the blind madness of Laocoön struggling with his sons in the coils of the giant serpent. In these moments he was not fighting men. They were monsters, yellow, foul-smelling, unhuman, and he fought as Laocoön fought. As if it had been a cane, he snapped the bone of an arm whose hand was throttling him; he twisted back a head until it snapped between its shoulders; he struck and broke with a blind fury and a giant strength, until at last, torn and covered with blood, he leaped free and reached the door. As he opened it and sprang through, he had the visual impression that only two of his assailants were rising from the floor.

For the space of a second he hesitated in the little hallway. Down the stairs was light—and people. He knew that he was bleeding and his clothes were torn, and that flight in that direction was impossible. At the opposite end of the hall was a curtain which he judged must cover a window. With a swift movement he tore down this curtain and found that he was right. In another second he had crashed the window outward with his shoulder, and felt the cool air of the night in his face. The door behind him was still closed when he crawled out upon a narrow landing at the top of a flight of steps leading down into the alley. He paused long enough to convince himself that his enemies were making no effort to follow him, and as he went down the steps, he caught himself grimly chuckling. He had given them enough.

In the darkness of the alley he paused again. A cool breeze fanned his cheeks, and the effect of it was to free him of the horror that had gripped him in his fight with the yellow men. Again the calmness with which he had faced Kao possessed him. The Chinaman was dead. He was

sure of that. And for him there was not a minute to lose.

After all, it was his fate. The game had been played, and he had lost. There was one thing left undone, one play Conniston would still make, if he were there. And he, too, would make it. It was no longer necessary for him to give himself up to McDowell, for Kao was dead, and Miriam Kirkstone was saved. It was still right and just for him to fight for his life. But Mary Josephine must know *from him*. It was the last square play he could make.

No one saw him as he made his way through alleys to the outskirts of the town. A quarter of an hour later he came up the slope to the Shack. It was lighted, and the curtains were raised to brighten his way up the hill. Mary Josephine was waiting for him.

Again there came over him the strange and deadly calmness with which he had met the tragedy of that night. He had tried to wipe the blood from his face, but it was still there when he entered and faced Mary Josephine. The wounds made by the razor-like nails of his assailants

were bleeding; he was hatless, his hair was disheveled, and his throat and a part of his chest were bare where his clothes had been torn away. As Mary Josephine came toward him, her arms reaching out to him, her face dead white, he stretched out a restraining hand, and said,

"Please wait, Mary Josephine!"

Something stopped her—the strangeness of his voice, the terrible hardness of his face, gray and blood-stained, the something appalling and commanding in the way he had spoken. He passed her quickly on his way to the telephone. Her lips moved; she tried to speak; one of her hands went to her throat. He was calling Miriam Kirkstone's number! And now she saw that his hands, too, were bleeding. There came the murmur of a voice in the telephone. Someone answered. And then she heard him say,

"Shan Tung is dead!"

That was all. He hung up the receiver and turned toward her. With a little cry she moved toward him.

"Derry—Derry——"

He evaded her and pointed to the big

chair in front of the fireplace. "Sit down, Mary Josephine."

She obeyed him. Her face was whiter than he had thought a living face could be. And then, from the beginning to the end, he told her everything. Mary Josephine made no sound, and in the big chair she seemed to crumple smaller and smaller as he confessed the great lie to her, from the hour Conniston and he had traded identities in the little cabin on the Barren. Until he died he knew she would haunt him as he saw her there for the last time—her dead-white face, her great eyes, her voiceless lips, her two little hands clutched at her breast as she listened to the story of the great lie and his love for her.

Even when he had done, she did not move or speak. He went into his room, closed the door, and turned on the lights. Quickly he put into his pack what he needed. And when he was ready, he wrote on a piece of paper:

"A thousand times I repeat, 'I love you.' Forgive me if you can. If you cannot forgive, you may tell McDowell, and

the Law will find me up at the place of our dreams—the river's end.

JOHN KEITH."

This last message he left on the table for Mary Josephine.

For a moment he listened at the door. Outside there was no movement, no sound. Quietly, then, he raised the window through which Kao had come into his room.

A moment later he stood under the light of the brilliant stars. Faintly there came to him the sounds of the city, the sound of life, of gayety, of laughter and of happiness, rising to him now from out of the valley.

He faced the north. Down the side of the hill and over the valley lay the forests. And through the starlight he strode back to them once more, back to their cloisters and their heritage, the heritage of the hunted and the outcast.

XXIII

ALL through the starlit hours of that night John Keith trudged steadily into the Northwest. For a long time his direction took him through slashings, second-growth timber, and cleared lands; he followed rough roads and worn trails and passed cabins that were dark and without life in the silence of midnight. Twice a dog caught the stranger scent in the air and howled; once he heard a man's voice, far away, raised in a shout. Then the trails grew rougher. He came to a deep wide swamp. He remembered that swamp, and before he plunged into it, he struck a match to look at his compass and his watch. It took him two hours to make the other side. He was in the deep and uncut timber then, and a sense of relief swept over him. The forest was again his only friend.

He did not rest. His brain and his body demanded the action of steady progress, though it was not through fear of what lay

behind him. Fear had ceased to be a stimulating part of him; it was even dead within him. It was as if his energy was engaged in fighting for a principle, and the principle was his life; he was following a duty, and this duty impelled him to make his greatest effort. He saw clearly what he had done and what was ahead of him. He was twice a killer of men now, and each time the killing had rid the earth of a snake. This last time it had been an exceedingly good job. Even McDowell would concede that, and Miriam Kirkstone, on her knees, would thank God for what he had done. But Canadian law did not split hairs like its big neighbor on the south. It wanted him at least for Kirkstone's killing if not for that of Kao, the Chinaman. No one, not even Mary Josephine, would ever fully realize what he had sacrificed for the daughter of the man who had ruined his father. For Mary Josephine would never understand how deeply he had loved her.

It surprised him to find how naturally he fell back into his old habit of discussing things with himself, and how com-

pletely and calmly he accepted the fact that his home-coming had been but a brief and wonderful interlude to his fugitivism. He did not know it at first, but this calmness was the calmness of a despair more fatal than the menace of the hangman.

"They won't catch me," he encouraged himself. "And she won't tell them where I'm going. No, she won't do that."

He found himself repeating that thought over and over again. Mary Josephine would not betray him. He repeated it, not as a conviction, but to fight back and hold down another thought that persisted in forcing itself upon him. And this thing, that at times was like a voice within him, cried out in its moments of life, "She hates you—and she *will* tell where you are going!"

With each hour it was harder for him to keep that voice down; it persisted, it grew stronger; in its intervals of triumph it rose over and submerged all other thoughts in him. It was not his fear of her betrayal that stabbed him; it was the underlying motive of it, the hatred that would inspire it. He tried not to vision her as

he had seen her last, in the big chair, crushed, shamed, outraged—seeing in him no longer the beloved brother, but an impostor, a criminal, a man whom she might suspect of killing that brother for his name and his place in life. But the thing forced itself on him. It was reasonable, and it was justice.

"But she won't do it," he told himself. "She won't do it."

This was his fight, and its winning meant more to him than freedom. It was Mary Josephine who would live with him now, and not Conniston. It was her spirit that would abide with him, her voice he would hear in the whispers of the night, her face he would see in the glow of his lonely fires, and she must remain with him always as the Mary Josephine he had known. So he crushed back the whispering voice, beat it down with his hands clenched at his side, fought it through the hours of that night with the desperation of one who fights for a thing greater than life.

Toward dawn the stars began to fade out of the sky. He had been tireless, and he was tireless now. He felt no exhaus-

tion. Through the gray gloom that came before day he went on, and the first glow of sun found him still traveling. Prince Albert and the Saskatchewan were thirty miles to the south and east of him.

He stopped at last on the edge of a little lake and unburdened himself of his pack for the first time. He was glad that the premonition of just such a sudden flight as this had urged him to fill his emergency grub-sack yesterday morning. "Won't do any harm for us to be prepared," he had laughed jokingly to Mary Josephine, and Mary Josephine herself had made him double the portion of bacon because she was fond of it. It was hard for him to slice that bacon without a lump rising in his throat. Pork and love! He wanted to laugh, and he wanted to cry, and between the two it was a queer, half-choked sound that came to his lips. He ate a good breakfast, rested for a couple of hours, and went on. At a more leisurely pace he traveled through most of the day, and at night he camped.

In the ten days following his flight from Prince Albert he kept utterly out of sight.

He avoided trappers' shacks and trails and occasional Indians. He rid himself of his beard and shaved himself every other day. Mary Josephine had never cared much for the beard. It prickled. She had wanted him smooth-faced, and now he was that. He looked better, too. But the most striking resemblance to Derwent Conniston was gone. At the end of the ten days he was at Turtle Lake, fifty miles east of Fort Pitt. He believed that he could show himself openly now, and on the tenth day bartered with some Indians for fresh supplies. Then he struck south of Fort Pitt, crossed the Saskatchewan, and hit between the Blackfoot Hills and the Vermillion River into the Buffalo Coulee country. In the open country he came upon occasional ranches, and at one of these he purchased a pack-horse. At Buffalo Lake he bought his supplies for the mountains, including fifty steel traps, crossed the upper branch of the Canadian Pacific at night, and the next day saw in the far distance the purple haze of the Rockies.

It was six weeks after the night in Kao's place that he struck the Saskatchewan

again above the Brazeau. He did not hurry now. Just ahead of him slumbered the mountains; very close was the place of his dreams. But he was no longer impelled by the mighty lure of the years that were gone. Day by day something had worn away that lure, as the ceaseless grind of water wears away rock, and for two weeks he wandered slowly and without purpose in the green valleys that lay under the snow-tipped peaks of the ranges. He was gripped in the agony of an unutterable loneliness, which fell upon and scourged him like a disease. It was a deeper and more bitter thing than a yearning for companionship. He might have found that. Twice he was near camps. Three times he saw outfits coming out, and purposely drew away from them. He had no desire to meet men, no desire to talk or to be troubled by talking. Day and night his body and his soul cried out for Mary Josephine, and in his despair he cursed those who had taken her away from him. It was a crisis which was bound to come, and in his aloneness he fought it out. Day after day he fought it,

until his face and his heart bore the scars of it. It was as if a being on whom he had set all his worship had died, only it was worse than death. Dead, Mary Josephine would still have been his inspiration; in a way she would have belonged to him. But living, hating him as she must, his dreams of her were a sacrilege and his love for her like the cut of a sword.

In the end he was like a man who had triumphed over a malady that would always leave its marks upon him. In the beginning of the third week he knew that he had conquered, just as he had triumphed in a similar way over death and despair in the north. He would go into the mountains, as he had planned. He would build his cabin. And if the Law came to get him, it was possible that again he would fight.

On the second day of this third week he saw advancing toward him a solitary horseman. The stranger was possibly a mile away when he discovered him, and he was coming straight down the flat of the valley. That he was not accompanied by a pack-horse surprised Keith, for he

was bound out of the mountains and not in. Then it occurred to him that he might be a prospector whose supplies were exhausted, and that he was easing his journey by using his pack as a mount. Whoever and whatever he was, Keith was not in any humor to meet him, and without attempting to conceal himself he swung away from the river, as if to climb the slope of the mountain on his right. No sooner had he clearly signified the new direction he was taking, than the stranger deliberately altered his course in a way to cut him off. Keith was irritated. Climbing up a narrow terrace of shale, he headed straight up the slope, as if his intention were to reach the higher terraces of the mountain, and then he swung suddenly down into a coulee, where he was out of sight. Here he waited for ten minutes, then struck deliberately and openly back into the valley.

He chuckled when he saw how cleverly his ruse had worked. The stranger was a quarter of a mile up the mountain and still climbing.

"Now what the devil is he taking

all that trouble for?" Keith asked himself.

An instant later the stranger saw him again. For perhaps a minute he halted, and in that minute Keith fancied he was getting a round cursing. Then the stranger headed for him, and this time there was no escape, for the moment he struck the shelving slope of the valley, he prodded his horse into a canter, swiftly diminishing the distance between them. Keith unbuttoned the flap of his pistol holster and maneuvered so that he would be partly concealed by his pack when the horseman rode up. The persistence of the stranger suggested to him that Mary Josephine had lost no time in telling McDowell where the law would be most likely to find him.

Then he looked over the neck of his pack at the horseman, who was quite near, and was convinced that he was not an officer. He was still jogging at a canter and riding atrociously. One leg was flapping as if it had lost its stirrup-hold; the rider's arms were pumping, and his hat was sailing behind at the end of a string.

"Whoa!" said Keith.

His heart stopped its action. He was staring at a big red beard and a huge, shaggy head. The horseman reined in, floundered from his saddle, and swayed forward as if seasick.

"Well, I'll be——"

"Duggan!"

"Johnny—Johnny Keith!"

XXIV

FOR a matter of ten seconds neither of the two men moved. Keith was stunned. Andy Duggan's eyes were fairly popping out from under his bushy brows. And then unmistakably Keith caught the scent of bacon in the air.

"Andy—Andy Duggan," he choked "You know me—you know Johnny Keith —you know me—you——"

Duggan answered with an inarticulate bellow and jumped at Keith as if to bear him to the ground. He hugged him, and Keith hugged, and then for a minute they stood pumping hands until their faces were red, and Duggan was growling over and over:

"An' you passed me there at McCoffin's Bend—an' I didn't know you, I didn't know you, I didn't know you! I thought you was that cussed Conniston! I did. ught you was Conniston!" He stood at last. "Johnny—Johnny Keith!"

"Andy, you blessed old devil!"

They pumped hands again, pounded shoulders until they were sore, and in Keith's face blazed once more the love of life.

Suddenly old Duggan grew rigid and sniffed the air. "I smell bacon!"

"It's in the pack, Andy. But for Heaven's sake don't notice the bacon until you explain how you happen to be here."

"Been waitin' for you," replied Duggan in an affectionate growl. "Knew you'd have to come down this valley to hit the Little Fork. Been waitin' six weeks."

Keith dug his fingers into Duggan's arm.

"How did you know I was coming *here?*" he demanded. "Who told you?"

"All come out in the wash, Johnny. Pretty mess. Chinaman dead. Johnny Keith, alias Conniston, alive an' living with Conniston's pretty sister. Johnny gone —skipped. No one knew where. I made guesses. Knew the girl would know if anyone did. I went to her, told her how you'n me had been pals, an' she give me

the idee you was goin' up to the river's end. I resigned from the Betty M., that night. Told her, though, that she was a ninny if she thought you'd go up there. Made her believe the note was just a blind."

"My God," breathed Keith hopelessly, "I meant it."

"Sure you did, Johnny. I knew it. But I didn't dare let *her* know it. If you could ha' seen that pretty mouth o' hern curlin' up as if she'd liked to have bit open your throat, an' her hands clenched, an' that murder in her eyes—Man, I lied to her then! I told her I was after you, an' that if she wouldn't put the police on you, I'd bring back your head to her, as they used to do in the old times. An' she bit. Yes, sir, she said to me, 'If you'll do that, I won't say a word to the police!' An' here I am, Johnny. An' if I keep my word with that little tiger, I've got to shoot you right now. Haw! Haw!"

Keith had turned his face away.

Duggan, pulling him about by the shoulders, opened his eyes wide in amazement.—"Johnny——"

"Maybe you don't understand, Andy," struggled Keith. "I'm sorry—she feels—like that."

For a moment Duggan was silent. Then he exploded with a sudden curse. "*Sorry!* What the devil you sorry for, Johnny? You treated her square, an' you left her almost all of Conniston's money. She ain't no kick comin', and she ain't no reason for feelin' like she does. Let 'er go to the devil, I say. She's pretty an' sweet an' all that—but when anybody wants to go clawin' your heart out, don't be fool enough to feel sorry about it. You lied to her, but what's that? There's bigger lies than yourn been told, Johnny, a whole sight bigger! Don't you go worryin'. I've been here waitin' six weeks, an' I've done a lot of thinkin', and all our plans are set an' hatched. An' I've got the nicest cabin all built and waitin' for us up the Little Fork. Here we are. Let's be joyful, son!" He laughed into Keith's tense, gray face. "Let's be joyful!"

Keith forced a grin. Duggan didn't know. He hadn't guessed what that "little tiger who would have liked to have bit

open his throat" had been to him. The thick-headed old hero, loyal to the bottom of his soul, hadn't guessed. And it came to Keith then that he would never tell him. He would keep that secret. He would bury it in his burned-out soul, and he would be "joyful" if he could. Duggan's blazing, happy face, half buried in its great beard, was like the inspiration and cheer of a sun rising on a dark world. He was not alone. Duggan, the old Duggan of years ago, the Duggan who had planned and dreamed with him, his best friend, was with him now, and the light came back into his face as he looked toward the mountains. Off there, only a few miles distant, was the Little Fork, winding into the heart of the Rockies, seeking out its hidden valleys, its trailless cañons, its hidden mysteries. Life lay ahead of him, life with its thrill and adventure, and at his side was the friend of all friends to seek it with him. He thrust out his hands.

"God bless you, Andy," he cried. "You're the gamest pal that ever lived!"

A moment later Duggan pointed to a clump of timber half a mile ahead. "It's past dinner-time," he said. "There's wood. If you've got any bacon aboard, I move we eat."

An hour later Andy was demonstrating that his appetite was as voracious as ever. Before describing more of his own activities, he insisted that Keith recite his adventures from the night "he killed that old skunk, Kirkstone."

It was two o'clock when they resumed their journey. An hour later they struck the Little Fork and until seven traveled up the stream. They were deep in the lap of the mountains when they camped for the night. After supper, smoking his pipe, Duggan stretched himself out comfortably with his back to a tree.

"Good thing you come along when you did, Johnny," he said. "I been waitin' in that valley ten days, an' the eats was about gone when you hove in sight. Meant to hike back to the cabin for supplies tomorrow or next day. Gawd, ain't this the life! An' we're goin' to find gold, Johnny, we're goin' to find it!"

"We've got all our lives to—to find it in," said Keith.

Duggan puffed out a huge cloud of smoke and heaved a great sigh of pleasure. Then he grunted and chuckled. "Lord, what a little firebrand that sister of Conniston's is!" he exclaimed. "Johnny, I bet if you'd walk in on her now, she'd kill you with her own hands. Don't see why she hates you so, just because you tried to save your life. Of course you must ha' lied like the devil. Couldn't help it. But a lie ain't nothin'. I've told some whoppers, an' no one ain't never wanted to kill me for it. I ain't afraid of McDowell. Everyone said the Chink was a good riddance. It's the girl. There won't be a minute all her life she ain't thinkin' of you, an' she won't be satisfied until she's got you. That is, she thinks she won't. But we'll fool the little devil, Johnny. We'll keep our eyes open —an' fool her!"

"Let's talk of pleasanter things," said Keith. "I've got fifty traps in the pack, Andy. You remember how we used to plan on trapping during the winter and

hunting for gold during the summer?"

Duggan rubbed his hands until they made a rasping sound; he talked of lynx signs he had seen, and of marten and fox. He had panned "colors" at a dozen places along the Little Fork and was ready to make his affidavit that it was the same gold he had dredged at McCoffin's Bend.

"If we don't find it this fall, we'll be sittin' on the mother lode next summer," he declared, and from then until it was time to turn in he talked of nothing but the yellow treasure it had been his life-long dream to find. At the last, when they had rolled in their blankets, he raised himself on his elbow for a moment and said to Keith:

"Johnny, don't you worry about that Conniston girl. I forgot to tell you I've took time by the forelock. Two weeks ago I wrote an' told her I'd learned you was hittin' into the Great Slave country, an' that I was about to hike after you. So go to sleep an' don't worry about that pesky little rattlesnake."

"I'm not worrying," said Keith.

Fifteen minutes later he heard Duggan

snoring. Quietly he unwrapped his blanket and sat up. There were still burning embers in the fire, the night—like that first night of his flight—was a glory of stars, and the moon was rising. Their camp was in a small, meadowy pocket in the center of which was a shimmering little lake across which he could easily have thrown a stone. On the far side of this was the sheer wall of a mountain, and the top of this wall, thousands of feet up, caught the glow of the moon first. Without awakening his comrade, Keith walked to the lake. He watched the golden illumination as it fell swiftly lower over the face of the mountain. He could see it move like a great flood. And then, suddenly, his shadow shot out ahead of him, and he turned to find the moon itself glowing like a monstrous ball between the low shoulders of a mountain to the east. The world about him became all at once vividly and wildly beautiful. It was as if a curtain had lifted so swiftly the eye could not follow it. Every tree and shrub and rock stood out in a mellow spotlight; the lake was transformed to a pool of molten

silver, and as far as he could see, where shoulders and ridges did not cut him out, the moonlight was playing on the mountains. In the air was a soft droning like low music, and from a distant crag came the rattle of loosened rocks. He fancied, for a moment, that Mary Josephine was standing at his side, and that together they were drinking in the wonder of this dream at last come true. Then a cry came to his lips, a broken, gasping man-cry which he could not keep back, and his heart was filled with anguish.

With all its beauty, all its splendor of quiet and peace, the night was a bitter one for Keith, the bitterest of his life. He had not believed the worst of Mary Josephine. He knew he had lost her and that she might despise him, but that she would actually hate him with the desire for a personal vengeance he had not believed. Was Duggan right? Was Mary Josephine unfair? And should he in self-defense fight to poison his own thoughts against her? His face set hard, and a joyless laugh fell from his lips. He knew that he was facing the inevitable. No matter what

had happened, he must go on loving Mary Josephine.

All through that night he was awake. Half a dozen times he went to his blanket, but it was impossible for him to sleep. At four o'clock he built up the fire and at five roused Duggan. The old river-man sprang up with the enthusiasm of a boy. He came back from the lake with his beard and head dripping and his face glowing. All the mountains held no cheerier comrade than Duggan.

They were on the trail at six o'clock and hour after hour kept steadily up the Little Fork. The trail grew rougher, narrower, and more difficult to follow, and at intervals Duggan halted to make sure of the way. At one of these times he said to Keith:

"Las' night proved there ain't no danger from her, Johnny. I had a dream, an' dreams goes by contraries an' always have. What you dream never comes true. It's always the opposite. An' I dreamed that little she-devil come up on you when you was asleep, took a big bread-knife, an' cut your head plumb off! Yessir, I could see

her holdin' up that head o' yourn, an' the blood was drippin', an' she was a-laughin'——"

"*Shut up!*" Keith fairly yelled the words. His eyes blazed. His face was dead white.

With a shrug of his huge shoulders and a sullen grunt Duggan went on.

An hour later the trail narrowed into a short cañon, and this cañon, to Keith's surprise, opened suddenly into a beautiful valley, a narrow oasis of green hugged in between the two ranges. Scarcely had they entered it, when Duggan raised his voice in a series of wild yells and began firing his rifle into the air.

"Home-coming," he explained to Keith, after he was done. "Cabin's just over that bulge. Be there in ten minutes."

In less than ten minutes Keith saw it, sheltered in the edge of a thick growth of cedar and spruce from which its timbers had been taken. It was a larger cabin than he had expected to see—twice, three times as large.

"How did you do it alone!" he exclaimed in admiration. "It's a wonder,

Andy. Big enough for—for a whole family!"

"Half a dozen Indians happened along, an' I hired 'em," explained Duggan. "Thought I might as well make it big enough, Johnny, seein' I had plenty of help. Sometimes I snore pretty loud, an'——"

"There's smoke coming out of it," cried Keith.

"Kept one of the Indians," chuckled Duggan. "Fine cook, an' a sassy-lookin' little squaw she is, Johnny. Her husband died last winter, an' she jumped at the chance to stay, for her board an' five bucks a month. How's your Uncle Andy for a schemer, eh, Johnny?"

A dozen rods from the cabin was a creek. Duggan halted here to water his horse and nodded for Keith to go on.

"Take a look, Johnny; go ahead an' take a look! I'm sort of sot up over that cabin."

Keith handed his reins to Duggan and obeyed. The cabin door was open, and he entered. One look assured him that Duggan had good reason to be "sot up."

The first big room reminded him of the Shack. Beyond that was another room in which he heard someone moving and the crackle of a fire in a stove. Outside Duggan was whistling. He broke off whistling to sing, and as Keith listened to the river-man's bellowing voice chanting the words of the song he had sung at McCoffin's Bend for twenty years, he grinned. And then he heard the humming of a voice in the kitchen. Even the squaw was happy.

And then—and then—

"GREAT GOD IN HEAVEN——"

In the doorway she stood, her arms reaching out to him, love, glory, triumph in her face—*Mary Josephine!*

He swayed; he groped out; something blinded him—tears—hot, blinding tears that choked him, that came with a sob in his throat. And then she was in his arms, and her arms were around him, and she was laughing and crying, and he heard her say: "Why—why didn't you come back—to me—that night? Why—why did you—go out—through the—window? I—I was

waiting—and I—I'd have gone—with you——"

From the door behind them came Duggan's voice, chuckling, exultant, booming with triumph. "Johnny, didn't I tell you there was lots bigger lies than yourn? Didn't I? Eh?"

XXV

IT was many minutes, after Keith's arms had closed around Mary Josephine, before he released her enough to hold her out and look at her. She was there, every bit of her, eyes glowing with a greater glory and her face wildly aflush with a thing that had never been there before; and suddenly, as he devoured her in that hungry look, she gave a little cry, and hugged herself to his breast, and hid her face there.

And he was whispering again and again, as though he could find no other word, "Mary—Mary—Mary——"

Duggan drew away from the do[illegible]. The two had paid no attention to his voice, and the old river-man was one continuous chuckle as he unpacked Keith's horse and attended to his own, hobbling them both and tying cow-bells to them. It was half an hour before he ventured up out of the grove along the creek and approached

the cabin again. Even then he halted, fussing with a piece of harness, until he saw Mary Josephine in the door. The sun was shining on her. Her glorious hair was down, and behind her was Keith, so close that his shoulders were covered with it. Like a bird Mary Josephine sped to Duggan. Great red beard and all she hugged him, and on the flaming red of his bare cheek-bone she kissed him.

"Gosh," said Duggan, at a loss for something better to say. "Gosh——"

Then Keith had him by the hand. "Andy, you ripsnorting old liar, if you weren't old enough to be my father, I'd whale the daylights out of you!" he cried joyously. "I would, just because I love you so! You've made this day the—the—the——"

"—The most memorable of my life," helped Mary Josephine. "Is that it—John?"

Timidly, for the first time, her cheek against his shoulder, she spoke his name.

And before Duggan's eyes Keith kissed her.

Hours later, in a world aglow with the

light of stars and a radiant moon, Keith and Mary Josephine were alone out in the heart of their little valley. To Keith it was last night returned, only more wonderful. There was the same droning song in the still air, the low rippling of running water, the mysterious whisperings of the mountains. All about them were the guardian peaks of the snow-capped ranges, and under their feet was the soft lush of grass and the sweet scent of flowers. "Our valley of dreams," Mary Josephine had named it, an infinite happiness trembling in her voice. "Our beautiful valley of dreams—come true!"

"And you would have come with me—that night?" asked Keith wonderingly. "That night—I ran away?"

"Yes. I didn't hear you go. And at last I went to your door and listened, and then I knocked, and after that I called to you, and when you didn't answer, I entered your room."

"Dear heaven!" breathed Keith. "After all that, you would have come away with me, covered with blood, a—a murderer, they say—a hunted man——"

"John, dear." She took one of his hands in both her own and held it tight. "John, dear, I've got something to tell you."

He was silent.

"I made Duggan promise not to tell you I was here when he found you, and I made him promise something else—to keep a secret I wanted to tell you myself. It was wonderful of him. I don't see how he did it."

She snuggled still closer to him, and held his hand a little tighter. "You see, John, there was a terrible time after you killed Shan Tung. Only a little while after you had gone, I saw the sky growing red. It was Shan Tung's place—afire. I was terrified, and my heart was broken, and I didn't move. I must have sat at the window a long time, when the door burst open suddenly and Miriam ran in, and behind her came McDowell. Oh, I never heard a man swear as McDowell swore when he found you had gone, and Miriam flung herself on the floor at my feet and buried her head in my lap.

"McDowell tramped up and down, and

at last he turned to me as if he was going to eat me, and he fairly shouted, 'Do you know—*that cursed fool didn't kill Judge Kirkstone!*'"

There was a pause in which Keith's brain reeled. And Mary Josephine went on, as quietly as though she were talking about that evening's sunset:

"Of course, I knew all along, from what you had told me about John Keith, that he wasn't what you would call a murderer. You see, John, I had learned to *love* John Keith. It was the other thing that horrified me! In the fight, that night, Judge Kirkstone wasn't badly hurt, just stunned. Peter Kirkstone and his father were always quarreling. Peter wanted money, and his father wouldn't give it to him. It seems impossible,—what happened then. But it's true. After you were gone *Peter Kirkstone killed his father that he might inherit the estate!* And then he laid the crime on you!"

"My God!" breathed Keith. "Mary—Mary Josephine—how do you know?"

"Peter Kirkstone was terribly burned in the fire. He died that night, and before

he died he confessed. That was the power Shan Tung held over Miriam. He knew. And Miriam was to pay the price that would save her brother from the hangman."

"And that," whispered Keith, as if to himself, "was why she was so interested in John Keith."

He looked away into the shimmering distance of the night, and for a long time both were silent. A woman had found happiness. A man's soul had come out of darkness into light.

THE END

THE VALLEY *of* SILENT MEN

The VALLEY *of* SILENT MEN

BEFORE the railroad's thin lines of steel bit their way up through the wilderness, Athabasca Landing was the picturesque threshold over which one must step who would enter into the mystery and adventure of the great white North. It is still *Iskwatam*—the "door" which opens to the lower reaches of the Athabasca, the Slave, and the Mackenzie. It is somewhat difficult to find on the map, yet it is there, because its history is written in more than a hundred and forty years of romance and tragedy and adventure in the lives of men, and is not easily forgotten. Over the old trail it was about a hundred and fifty miles north of Edmonton. The railroad has brought it nearer to that base of civilization, but beyond it the wilderness still howls as it has howled for a thousand years, and the waters of a continent flow north and into the Arctic Ocean. It is possible that the beautiful dream of the real-estate dealers may come true, for the most avid of all the sportsmen of the earth, the money-hunters, have come up on the bumpy railroad that sometimes lights its sleeping cars with lanterns,

and with them have come typewriters, and stenographers, and the art of printing advertisements, and the Golden Rule of those who sell handfuls of earth to hopeful purchasers thousands of miles away—"Do others as they would do you." And with it, too, has come the legitimate business of barter and trade, with eyes on all that treasure of the North which lies between the Grand Rapids of the Athabasca and the edge of the polar sea. But still more beautiful than the dream of fortunes quickly made is the deep-forest superstition that the spirits of the wilderness dead move onward as steam and steel advance, and if this is so, the ghosts of a thousand Pierres and Jacquelines have risen uneasily from their graves at Athabasca Landing, hunting a new quiet farther north.

For it was Pierre and Jacqueline, Henri and Marie, Jacques and his Jeanne, whose brown hands for a hundred and forty years opened and closed this door. And those hands still master a savage world for two thousand miles north of that threshold of Athabasca Landing. South of it a wheezy engine drags up the freight that came not so many months ago by boat.

It is over this threshold that the dark eyes of Pierre and Jacqueline, Henri and Marie, Jacques and his Jeanne, look into the blue and the gray and the sometimes watery ones of a destroying civilization. And there it is that the shriek of a mad locomotive mingles with their age-old river chants; the smut of coal drifts

over their forests; the phonograph screeches its reply to *le violon;* and Pierre and Henri and Jacques no longer find themselves the kings of the earth when they come in from far countries with their precious cargoes of furs. And they no longer swagger and tell loud-voiced adventure, or sing their wild river songs in the same old abandon, for there are streets at Athabasca Landing now, and hotels, and schools, and rules and regulations of a kind new and terrifying to the bold of the old *voyageurs.*

It seems only yesterday that the railroad was not there, and a great world of wilderness lay between the Landing and the upper rim of civilization. And when word first came that a steam thing was eating its way up foot by foot through forest and swamp and impassable muskeg, that word passed up and down the water-ways for two thousand miles, a colossal joke, a stupendous bit of drollery, the funniest thing that Pierre and Henri and Jacques had heard in all their lives. And when Jacques wanted to impress upon Pierre his utter disbelief of a thing, he would say:

"It will happen, m'sieu, when the steam thing comes to the Landing, when cow-beasts eat with the moose, and when our bread is found for us in yonder swamps!"

And the steam thing came, and cows grazed where the moose had fed, and bread *was* gathered close to

the edge of the great swamps. Thus did civilization break into Athabasca Landing.

Northward from the Landing, for two thousand miles, reached the domain of the rivermen. And the Landing, with its two hundred and twenty-seven souls before the railroad came, was the wilderness clearing-house which sat at the beginning of things. To it came from the south all the freight which must go into the north; on its flat river front were built the great scows which carried this freight to the end of the earth. It was from the Landing that the greatest of all river brigades set forth upon their long adventures, and it was back to the Landing, perhaps a year or more later, that still smaller scows and huge canoes brought as the price of exchange their cargoes of furs.

Thus for nearly a century and a half the larger craft, with their great sweeps and their wild-throated crews, had gone *down* the river toward the Arctic Ocean, and the smaller craft, with their still wilder crews, had come *up* the river toward civilization. The River, as the Landing speaks of it, is the Athabasca, with its headwaters away off in the British Columbian mountains, where Baptiste and McLeod, explorers of old, gave up their lives to find where the cradle of it lay. And it sweeps past the Landing, a slow and mighty giant, unswervingly on its way to the northern sea. With it the river brigades set forth. For Pierre and Henri and Jacques it is going from one end to the other of the earth. The Athabasca ends and is

replaced by the Slave, and the Slave empties into Great Slave Lake, and from the narrow tip of that Lake the Mackenzie carries on for more than a thousand miles to the sea.

In this distance of the long water trail one sees and hears many things. It is life. It is adventure. It is mystery and romance and hazard. Its tales are so many that books could not hold them. In the faces of men and women they are written. They lie buried in graves so old that the forest trees grow over them. Epics of tragedy, of love, of the fight to live! And as one goes farther north, and still farther, just so do the stories of things that have happened change.

For the world is changing, the sun is changing, and the breeds of men are changing. At the Landing in July there are seventeen hours of sunlight; at Fort Chippewyan there are eighteen; at Fort Resolution, Fort Simpson, and Fort Providence there are nineteen; at the Great Bear twenty-one, and at Fort McPherson, close to the polar sea, from twenty-two to twenty-three. And in December there are also these hours of darkness. With light and darkness men change, women change, and life changes. And Pierre and Henri and Jacques meet them all, but always *they* are the same, chanting the old songs, enshrining the old loves, dreaming the same dreams, and worshiping always the same gods. They meet a thousand perils with eyes that glisten with the love of adventure.

The thunder of rapids and the howlings of storm do

not frighten them. Death has no fear for them. They grapple with it, wrestle joyously with it, and are glorious when they win. Their blood is red and strong. Their hearts are big. Their souls chant themselves up to the skies. Yet they are simple as children, and when they are afraid, it is of things which children fear. For in those hearts of theirs is superstition—and also, perhaps, royal blood. For princes and the sons of princes and the noblest aristocracy of France were the first of the gentlemen adventurers who came with ruffles on their sleeves and rapiers at their sides to seek furs worth many times their weight in gold two hundred and fifty years ago, and of these ancient forebears Pierre and Henri and Jacques, with their Maries and Jeannes and Jacquelines, are the living voices of today.

And these voices tell many stories. Sometimes they whisper them, as the wind would whisper, for there are stories weird and strange that must be spoken softly. They darken no printed pages. The trees listen to them beside red camp-fires at night. Lovers tell them in the glad sunshine of day. Some of them are chanted in song. Some of them come down through the generations, epics of the wilderness, remembered from father to son. And each year there are the new things to pass from mouth to mouth, from cabin to cabin, from the lower reaches of the Mackenzie to the far end of the world at Athabasca Landing. For the three rivers are always makers of

romance, of tragedy, of adventure. The story will never be forgotten of how Follette and Ladouceur swam their mad race through the Death Chute for love of the girl who waited at the other end, or of how Campbell O'Doone, the red-headed giant at Fort Resolution, fought the whole of a great brigade in his effort to run away with a scow captain's daughter.

And the brigade loved O'Doone, though it beat him, for these men of the strong north love courage and daring. The epic of the lost scow—how there were men who saw it disappear from under their very eyes, floating upward and afterward riding swiftly away in the skies—is told and retold by strong-faced men, deep in whose eyes are the smoldering flames of an undying superstition, and these same men thrill as they tell over again the strange and unbelievable story of Hartshope, the aristocratic Englishman who set off into the North in all the glory of monocle and unprecedented luggage, and how he joined in a tribal war, became a chief of the Dog Ribs, and married a dark-eyed, sleek-haired, little Indian beauty, who is now the mother of his children.

But deepest and most thrilling of all the stories they tell are the stories of the long arm of the Law —that arm which reaches for two thousand miles from Athabasca Landing to the polar sea, the arm of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police.

And of these it is the story of Jim Kent we are going to tell, of Jim Kent and of Marette, that won-

derful little goddess of the Valley of Silent Men, in whose veins there must have run the blood of fighting men—and of ancient queens. A story of the days before the railroad came.

CHAPTER I

IN the mind of James Grenfell Kent, sergeant in the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, there remained no shadow of a doubt. He knew that he was dying. He had implicit faith in Cardigan, his surgeon friend, and Cardigan had told him that what was left of his life would be measured out in hours—perhaps in minutes or seconds. It was an unusual case. There was one chance in fifty that he might live two or three days, but there was no chance at all that he would live more than three. The end might come with any breath he drew into his lungs. That was the pathological history of the thing, as far as medical and surgical science knew of cases similar to his own.

Personally, Kent did not feel like a dying man. His vision and his brain were clear. He felt no pain, and only at infrequent intervals was his temperature above normal. His voice was particularly calm and natural.

At first he had smiled incredulously when Cardigan broke the news. That the bullet which a drunken half-breed had sent into his chest two weeks before had nicked the arch of the aorta, thus forming an aneurism, was a statement by Cardigan which did not sound especially wicked or convincing to him.

"Aorta" and "aneurism" held about as much significance for him as his perichondrium or the process of his stylomastoid. But Kent possessed an unswerving passion to grip at facts in detail, a characteristic that had largely helped him to earn the reputation of being the best man-hunter in all the northland service. So he had insisted, and his surgeon friend had explained.

The aorta, he found, was the main blood-vessel arching over and leading from the heart, and in nicking it the bullet had so weakened its outer wall that it bulged out in the form of a sack, just as the inner tube of an automobile tire bulges through the outer casing when there is a blowout.

"And when that sack gives way inside you," Cardigan had explained, "you'll go like that!" He snapped a forefinger and thumb to drive the fact home.

After that it was merely a matter of common sense to believe, and now, sure that he was about to die, Kent had acted. He was acting in the full health of his mind and in extreme cognizance of the paralyzing shock he was contributing as a final legacy to the world at large, or at least to that part of it which knew him or was interested. The tragedy of the thing did not oppress him. A thousand times in his life he had discovered that humor and tragedy were very closely related, and that there were times when only the breadth of a hair separated the two. Many times he had seen a laugh change suddenly to tears, and tears to laughter.

The tableau, as it presented itself about his bedside now, amused him. Its humor was grim, but even in these last hours of his life he appreciated it. He had always more or less regarded life as a joke—a very serious joke, but a joke for all that—a whimsical and trickful sort of thing played by the Great Arbiter on humanity at large; and this last count in his own life, as it was solemnly and tragically ticking itself off, was the greatest joke of all. The amazed faces that stared at him, their passing moments of disbelief, their repressed but at times visible betrayals of horror, the steadiness of their eyes, the tenseness of their lips —all added to what he might have called, at another time, the dramatic artistry of his last great adventure.

That he was dying did not chill him, or make him afraid, or put a tremble into his voice. The contemplation of throwing off the mere habit of breathing had never at any stage of his thirty-six years of life appalled him. Those years, because he had spent a sufficient number of them in the raw places of the earth, had given him a philosophy and viewpoint of his own, both of which he kept unto himself without effort to impress them on other people. He believed that life itself was the cheapest thing on the face of all the earth. All other things had their limitations.

There was so much water and so much land, so many mountains and so many plains, so many square feet to live on and so many square feet to be buried in. All things could be measured, and stood up, and cata-

logued—except life itself. "Given time," he would say, "a single pair of humans can populate all creation." Therefore, being the cheapest of all things, it was true philosophy that life should be the easiest of all things to give up when the necessity came.

Which is only another way of emphasizing that Kent was not, and never had been, afraid to die. But it does not say that he treasured life a whit less than the man in another room, who, a day or so before, had fought like a lunatic before going under an anesthetic for the amputation of a bad finger. No man had loved life more than he. No man had lived nearer it.

It had been a passion with him. Full of dreams, and always with anticipations ahead, no matter how far short realizations fell, he was an optimist, a lover of the sun and the moon and the stars, a worshiper of the forests and of the mountains, a man who loved his life, and who had fought for it, and yet who was ready—at the last—to yield it up without a whimper when the fates asked for it.

Bolstered up against his pillows, he did not look the part of the fiend he was confessing himself to be to the people about him. Sickness had not emaciated him. The bronze of his lean, clean-cut face had faded a little, but the tanning of wind and sun and campfire was still there. His blue eyes were perhaps dulled somewhat by the nearness of death. One would not have judged him to be thirty-six, even though over one temple there was a streak of gray in his blond

hair—a heritage from his mother, who was dead. Looking at him, as his lips quietly and calmly confessed himself beyond the pale of men's sympathy or forgiveness, one would have said that his crime was impossible.

Through his window, as he sat bolstered up in his cot, Kent could see the slow-moving shimmer of the great Athabasca River as it moved on its way toward the Arctic Ocean. The sun was shining, and he saw the cool, thick masses of the spruce and cedar forests beyond, the rising undulations of wilderness ridges and hills, and through that open window he caught the sweet scents that came with a soft wind from out of the forests he had loved for so many years.

"They've been my best friends," he had said to Cardigan, "and when this nice little thing you're promising happens to me, old man, I want to go with my eyes on them."

So his cot was close to the window

Nearest to him sat Cardigan. In his face, more than in any of the others, was disbelief. Kedsty, Inspector of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, in charge of N Division during an indefinite leave of absence of the superintendent, was paler even than the girl whose nervous fingers were swiftly putting upon paper every word that was spoken by those in the room. O'Connor, staff-sergeant, was like one struck dumb. The little, smooth-faced Catholic missioner whose presence as a witness Kent had re-

quested, sat with his thin fingers tightly interlaced, silently placing this among all the other strange tragedies that the wilderness had given up to him. They had all been Kent's friends, his intimate friends, with the exception of the girl, whom Inspector Kedsty had borrowed for the occasion. With the little missioner he had spent many an evening, exchanging in mutual confidence the strange and mysterious happenings of the deep forests, and of the great north beyond the forests. O'Connor's friendship was a friendship bred of the brotherhood of the trails. It was Kent and O'Connor who had brought down the two Eskimo murderers from the mouth of the Mackenzie, and the adventure had taken them fourteen months. Kent loved O'Connor, with his red face, his red hair, and his big heart, and to him the most tragic part of it all was that he was breaking this friendship now.

But it was Inspector Kedsty, commanding N Division, the biggest and wildest division in all the Northland, that roused in Kent an unusual emotion, even as he waited for that explosion just over his heart which the surgeon had told him might occur at any moment. On his death-bed his mind still worked analytically. And Kedsty, since the moment he had entered the room, had puzzled Kent. The commander of N Division was an unusual man. He was sixty, with iron-gray hair, cold, almost colorless eyes in which one would search long for a gleam of either mercy or fear, and a nerve that Kent had never seen

even slightly disturbed. It took such a man, an iron man, to run N Division according to law, for N Division covered an area of six hundred and twenty thousand square miles of wildest North America, extending more than two thousand miles north of the 70th parallel of latitude, with its farthest limit three and one-half degrees within the Arctic Circle. To police this area meant upholding the law in a country fourteen times the size of the state of Ohio. And Kedsty was the man who had performed this duty as only one other man had ever succeeded in doing it.

Yet Kedsty, of the five about Kent, was most disturbed. His face was ash-gray. A number of times Kent had detected a broken note in his voice. He had seen his hands grip at the arms of the chair he sat in until the cords stood out on them as if about to burst. He had never seen Kedsty sweat until now.

Twice the Inspector had wiped his forehead with a handkerchief. He was no longer *Minisak*—"The Rock"—a name given to him by the Crees. The armor that no shaft had ever penetrated seemed to have dropped from him. He had ceased to be Kedsty, the most dreaded inquisitor in the service. He was nervous, and Kent could see that he was fighting to repossess himself.

"Of course you know what this means to the Service," he said in a hard, low voice. "It means——"

"Disgrace," nodded Kent. "I know. It means a black spot on the otherwise bright escutcheon of N

Division. But it can't be helped. I killed John Barkley. The man you've got in the guard-house, condemned to be hanged by the neck until he is dead, is innocent. I understand. It won't be nice for the Service to let it be known that a sergeant in His Majesty's Royal Mounted is an ordinary murderer, but——"

"Not an *ordinary* murderer," interrupted Kedsty. "As you have described it, the crime was deliberate—horrible and inexcusable to its last detail. You were not moved by a sudden passion. You tortured your victim. It is inconceivable!"

"And yet true," said Kent.

He was looking at the stenographer's slim fingers as they put down his words and Kedsty's. A bit of sunshine touched her bowed head, and he observed the red lights in her hair. His eyes swept to O'Connor, and in that moment the commander of N Division bent over him, so close that his face almost touched Kent's, and he whispered, in a voice so low that no one of the other four could hear,

"Kent—you lie!"

"No, it is true," replied Kent.

Kedsty drew back, again wiping the moisture from his forehead.

"I killed Barkley, and I killed him as I planned that he should die," Kent went on. "It was my desire that he should suffer. The one thing which I shall

not tell you is *why* I killed him. But it was a sufficient reason."

He saw the shuddering tremor that swept through the shoulders of the girl who was putting down the condemning notes.

"And you refuse to confess your motive?"

"Absolutely—except that he had wronged me in a way that deserved death."

"And you make this confession knowing that you are about to die?"

The flicker of a smile passed over Kent's lips. He looked at O'Connor and for an instant saw in O'Connor's eyes a flash of their old comradeship.

"Yes. Dr. Cardigan has told me. Otherwise I should have let the man in the guard-house hang. It's simply that this accursed bullet has spoiled my luck—and saved him!"

Kedsty spoke to the girl. For half an hour she read her notes, and after that Kent wrote his name on the last page. Then Kedsty rose from his chair.

"We have finished, gentlemen," he said.

They trailed out, the girl hurrying through the door first in her desire to free herself of an ordeal that had strained every nerve in her body. The commander of N Division was last to go. Cardigan hesitated, as if to remain, but Kedsty motioned him on. It was Kedsty who closed the door, and as he closed it he looked back, and for a flash Kent met his eyes squarely. In that moment he received an impression

which he had not caught while the Inspector was in the room. It was like an electrical shock in its unexpectedness, and Kedsty must have seen the effect of it in his face, for he moved back quickly and closed the door. In that instant Kent had seen in Kedsty's eyes and face a look that was not only of horror, but what in the face and eyes of another man he would have sworn was fear.

It was a gruesome moment in which to smile, but Kent smiled. The shock was over. By the rules of the Criminal Code he knew that Kedsty even now was instructing Staff-Sergeant O'Connor to detail an officer to guard his door. The fact that he was ready to pop off at any moment would make no difference in the regulations of the law. And Kedsty was a stickler for the law as it was written. Through the closed door he heard voices indistinctly. Then there were footsteps, dying away. He could hear the heavy thump, thump of O'Connor's big feet. O'Connor had always walked like that, even on the trail.

Softly then the door reopened, and Father Layonne, the little missioner, came in. Kent knew that this would be so, for Father Layonne knew neither code nor creed that did not reach all the hearts of the wilderness. He came back, and sat down close to Kent, and took one of his hands and held it closely in both of his own. They were not the soft, smooth hands of the priestly hierarchy, but were hard with the callosity of toil, yet gentle with the gentleness of

a great sympathy. He had loved Kent yesterday, when Kent had stood clean in the eyes of both God and men, and he still loved him today, when his soul was stained with a thing that must be washed away with his own life.

"I'm sorry, lad," he said. "I'm sorry."

Something rose up in Kent's throat that was not the blood he had been wiping away since morning. His fingers returned the pressure of the little missioner's hands. Then he pointed out through the window to the panorama of shimmering river and green forests.

"It is hard to say good-by to all that, Father," he said. "But, if you don't mind, I'd rather not talk about it. I'm not afraid of it. And why be unhappy because one has only a little while to live? Looking back over your life, does it seem so very long ago that you were a boy, a small boy?"

"The time has gone swiftly, very swiftly."

"It seems only yesterday—or so?"

"Yes, only yesterday—or so."

Kent's face lit up with the whimsical smile that long ago had reached the little missioner's heart. "Well, that's the way I'm looking at it, Father. There is only a yesterday, a today, and a tomorrow in the longest of our lives. Looking back from seventy years isn't much different from looking back from thirty-six *when* you're looking back and not ahead.

Do you think what I have just said will free Sandy McTrigger?"

"There is no doubt. Your statements have been accepted as a death-bed confession."

The little missioner, instead of Kent, was betraying a bit of nervousness.

"There are matters, my son—some few matters—which you will want attended to. Shall we not talk about them?"

"You mean——"

"Your people, first. I remember that once you told me there was no one. But surely there is some one somewhere."

Kent shook his head. "There is no one now. For ten years those forests out there have been father, mother, and home to me."

"But there must be personal affairs, affairs which you would like to entrust, perhaps, to me?"

Kent's face brightened, and for an instant a flash of humor leaped into his eyes. "It is funny," he chuckled. "Since you remind me of it, Father, it is quite in form to make my will. I've bought a few little pieces of land here. Now that the railroad has almost reached us from Edmonton, they've jumped up from the seven or eight hundred dollars I gave for them to about ten thousand. I want you to sell the lots and use the money in your work. Put as much of it on the Indians as you can. They've always been good brothers to me. And I wouldn't waste much

time in getting my signature on some sort of paper to that effect."

Father Layonne's eyes shone softly. "God will bless you for that, Jimmy," he said, using the intimate name by which he had known him. "And I think He is going to pardon you for something else, if you have the courage to ask Him."

"I am pardoned," replied Kent, looking out through the window. "I feel it. I know it, Father."

In his soul the little missioner was praying. He knew that Kent's religion was not his religion, and he did not press the service which he would otherwise have rendered. After a moment he rose to his feet, and it was the old Kent who looked up into his face, the clean-faced, gray-eyed, unafraid Kent, smiling in the old way.

"I have one big favor to ask of you, Father," he said. "If I've got a day to live, I don't want every one forcing the fact on me that I'm dying. If I've any friends left, I want them to come in and see me, and talk, and crack jokes. I want to smoke my pipe. I'll appreciate a box of cigars if you'll send 'em up. Cardigan can't object now. Will you arrange these things for me? They'll listen to you—and please shove my cot a little nearer the window before you go."

Father Layonne performed the service in silence. Then at last the yearning overcame him to have the soul speak out, that his God might be more merciful,

and he said: "My boy, you are sorry? You repent that you killed John Barkley?"

"No, I'm not sorry. It had to be done. And please don't forget the cigars, will you, Father?"

"No, I won't forget," said the little missioner, and turned away.

As the door opened and closed behind him, the flash of humor leaped into Kent's eyes again, and he chuckled even as he wiped another of the telltale stains of blood from his lips. He had played the game. And the funny part about it was that no one in all the world would ever know, except himself—and perhaps one other.

CHAPTER II

OUTSIDE Kent's window was Spring, the glorious Spring of the Northland, and in spite of the death-grip that was tightening in his chest he drank it in deeply and leaned over so that his eyes traveled over wide spaces of the world that had been his only a short time before.

It occurred to him that he had suggested this knoll that overlooked both settlement and river as the site for the building which Dr. Cardigan called his hospital. It was a structure rough and unadorned, unpainted, and sweetly smelling with the aroma of the spruce trees from the heart of which its unplaned lumber was cut. The breath of it was a thing to bring cheer and hope. Its silvery walls, in places golden and brown with pitch and freckled with knots, spoke joyously of life that would not die, and the woodpeckers came and hammered on it as though it were still a part of the forest, and red squirrels chattered on the roof and scampered about in play with a soft patter of feet.

"It's a pretty poor specimen of man that would die up here with all that under his eyes," Kent had said a year before, when he and Cardigan had picked

out the site. "If he died looking at that, why, he just simply ought to die, Cardigan," he had laughed.

And now he was that poor specimen, looking out on the glory of the world!

His vision took in the South and a part of the East and West, and in all those directions there was no end of the forest. It was like a vast, many-colored sea with uneven billows rising and falling until the blue sky came down to meet them many miles away. More than once his heart ached at the thought of the two thin ribs of steel creeping up foot by foot and mile by mile from Edmonton, a hundred and fifty miles away. It was, to him, a desecration, a crime against Nature, the murder of his beloved wilderness. For in his soul that wilderness had grown to be more than a thing of spruce and cedar and balsam, of poplar and birch; more than a great, unused world of river and lake and swamp. It was an individual, a thing. His love for it was greater than his love for man. It was his inarticulate God. It held him as no religion in the world could have held him, and deeper and deeper it had drawn him into the soul of itself, delivering up to him one by one its guarded secrets and its mysteries, opening for him page by page the book that was the greatest of all books. And it was the wonder of it now, the fact that it was near him, about him, embracing him, glowing for him in the sunshine, whispering to him in the soft breath of the air, nodding and talking to him from the crest of every ridge,

that gave to him a strange happiness even in these hours when he knew that he was dying.

And then his eyes fell nearer to the settlement which nestled along the edge of the shining river a quarter of a mile away. That, too, had been the wilderness, in the days before the railroad came. The poison of speculation was stirring, but it had not yet destroyed. Athabasca Landing was still the door that opened and closed on the great North. Its buildings were scattered and few, and built of logs and rough lumber. Even now he could hear the drowsy hum of the distant sawmill that was lazily turning out its grist. Not far away the wind-worn flag of the British Empire was floating over a Hudson Bay Company's post that had bartered in the trades of the North for more than a hundred years. Through that hundred years Athabasca Landing had pulsed with the heart-beats of strong men bred to the wilderness. Through it, working its way by river and dog sledge from the South, had gone the precious freight for which the farther North gave in exchange its still more precious furs. And today, as Kent looked down upon it, he saw that same activity as it had existed through the years of a century. A brigade of scows, laden to their gunwales, was just sweeping out into the river and into its current. Kent had watched the loading of them; now he saw them drifting lazily out from the shore, their long sweeps glinting in the sun, their crews singing wildly and fiercely their beloved *Chan-*

son des Voyageurs as their faces turned to the adventure of the North.

In Kent's throat rose a thing which he tried to choke back, but which broke from his lips in a low cry, almost a sob. He heard the distant singing, wild and free as the forests themselves, and he wanted to lean out of his window and shout a last good-by. For the brigade—a Company brigade, the brigade that had chanted its songs up and down the water reaches of the land for more than two hundred and fifty years —was starting north. And he knew where it was going—north, and still farther north; a hundred miles, five hundred, a thousand—and then another thousand before the last of the scows unburdened itself of its precious freight. For the lean and brown-visaged men who went with them there would be many months of clean living and joyous thrill under the open skies. Overwhelmed by the yearning that swept over him, Kent leaned back against his pillows and covered his eyes.

In those moments his brain painted for him swiftly and vividly the things he was losing. Tomorrow or next day he would be dead, and the river brigade would still be sweeping on—on into the Grand Rapids of the Athabasca, fighting the Death Chute, hazarding valiantly the rocks and rapids of the Grand Cascade, the whirlpools of the Devil's Mouth, the thundering roar and boiling dragon teeth of the Black Run —on to the end of the Athabasca, to the Slave, and

into the Mackenzie, until the last rock-blunted nose of the outfit drank the tide-water of the Arctic Ocean. And he, James Kent, would be *dead!*

He uncovered his eyes, and there was a wan smile on his lips as he looked forth once more. There were sixteen scows in the brigade, and the biggest, he knew, was captained by Pierre Rossand. He could fancy Pierre's big red throat swelling in mighty song, for Pierre's wife was waiting for him a thousand miles away. The scows were caught steadily now in the grip of the river, and it seemed to Kent, as he watched them go, that they were the last fugitives fleeing from the encroaching monsters of steel. Unconscious of the act, he reached out his arms, and his soul cried out its farewell, even though his lips were silent.

He was glad when they were gone and when the voices of the chanting oarsmen were lost in the distance. Again he listened to the lazy hum of the sawmill, and over his head he heard the velvety run of a red squirrel and then its reckless chattering. The forests came back to him. Across his cot fell a patch of golden sunlight. A stronger breath of air came laden with the perfume of balsam and cedar through his window, and when the door opened and Cardigan entered, he found the old Kent facing him.

There was no change in Cardigan's voice or manner as he greeted him. But there was a tenseness in his face which he could not conceal. He had brought in

Kent's pipe and tobacco. These he laid on a table until he had placed his head close to Kent's heart, listening to what he called the *bruit*—the rushing of blood through the aneurismal sac.

"Seems to me that I can hear it myself now and then," said Kent. "Worse, isn't it?"

Cardigan nodded. "Smoking may hurry it up a bit," he said. "Still, if you want to——"

Kent held out his hand for the pipe and tobacco. "It's worth it. Thanks, old man."

Kent loaded the pipe, and Cardigan lighted a match. For the first time in two weeks a cloud of smoke issued from between Kent's lips.

"The brigade is starting north," he said.

"Mostly Mackenzie River freight," replied Cardigan. "A long run."

"The finest in all the North. Three years ago O'Connor and I made it with the Follette outfit. Remember Follette—and Ladouceur? They both loved the same girl, and being good friends they decided to settle the matter by a swim through the Death Chute. The man who came through first was to have her. Gawd, Cardigan, what funny things happen! Follette came out first, but he was dead. He'd brained himself on a rock. And to this day Ladouceur hasn't married the girl, because he says Follette beat him; and that Follette's something-or-other would haunt him if he didn't play fair. It's a queer——"

He stopped and listened. In the hall was the approaching tread of unmistakable feet.

"O'Connor," he said.

Cardigan went to the door and opened it as O'Connor was about to knock. When the door closed again, the staff-sergeant was in the room alone with Kent. In one of his big hands he clutched a box of cigars, and in the other he held a bunch of vividly red fireflowers.

"Father Layonne shoved these into my hands as I was coming up," he explained, dropping them on the table. "And I—well—I'm breaking regulations to come up an' tell you something, Jimmy. I never called you a liar in my life, but I'm calling you one now!"

He was gripping Kent's hands in the fierce clasp of a friendship that nothing could kill. Kent winced, but the pain of it was joy. He had feared that O'Connor, like Kedsty, must of necessity turn against him. Then he noticed something unusual in O'Connor's face and eyes. The staff-sergeant was not easily excited, yet he was visibly disturbed now.

"I don't know what the others saw, when you were making that confession, Kent. Mebby my eyesight was better because I spent a year and a half with you on the trail. You were lying. What's your game, old man?"

Kent groaned. "Have I got to go all over it again?" he appealed.

O'Connor began thumping back and forth over the

floor. Kent had seen him that way sometimes in camp when there were perplexing problems ahead of them.

"You didn't kill John Barkley," he insisted. "I don't believe you did, and Inspector Kedsty doesn't believe it—yet the mighty queer part of it is——"

"What?"

"That Kedsty is acting on your confession in a big hurry. I don't believe it's according to Hoyle, as the regulations are written. But he's doing it. And I want to know—it's the biggest thing I *ever* wanted to know—did you kill Barkley?"

"O'Connor, if you don't believe a dying man's word—you haven't much respect for death, have you?"

"That's the theory on which the law works, but sometimes it ain't human. Confound it, man, *did you?*"

"Yes."

O'Connor sat down and with his finger-nails pried open the box of cigars. "Mind if I smoke with you?" he asked. "I need it. I'm shot up with unexpected things this morning. Do you care if I ask you about the girl?"

"The girl!" exclaimed Kent. He sat up straighter, staring at O'Connor.

The staff-sergeant's eyes were on him with questioning steadiness. "I see—you don't know her," he said, lighting his cigar. "Neither do I. Never saw

her before. That's why I am wondering about Inspector Kedsty. I tell you, it's queer. He didn't believe you this morning, yet he was all shot up. He wanted me to go with him to his house. The cords stood out on his neck like that—like my little finger.

"Then suddenly he changed his mind and said we'd go to the office. That took us along the road that runs through the poplar grove. It happened there. I'm not much of a girl's man, Kent, and I'd be a fool to try to tell you what she looked like. But there she was, standing in the path not ten feet ahead of us, and she stopped me in my tracks as quick as though she'd sent a shot into me. And she stopped Kedsty, too. I heard him give a sort of grunt—a funny sound, as though some one had hit him. I don't believe I could tell whether she had a dress on or not, for I never saw anything like her face, and her eyes, and her hair, and I stared at them like a thunderstruck fool. She didn't seem to notice me any more than if I'd been thin air, a ghost she couldn't see.

"She looked straight at Kedsty, and she kept looking at him—and then she passed us. Never said a word, mind you. She came so near I could have touched her with my hand, and not until she was that close did she take her eyes from Kedsty and look at me. And when she'd passed I thought what a couple of cursed idiots we were, standing there paralyzed, as if we'd never seen a beautiful girl before in our lives.

I went to remark that much to the Old Man when——"

O'Connor bit his cigar half in two as he leaned nearer to the cot.

"Kent, I swear that Kedsty was as white as chalk when I looked at him! There wasn't a drop of blood left in his face, and he was staring straight ahead, as though the girl still stood there, and he gave another of those grunts—it wasn't a laugh—as if something was choking him. And then he said:

"'Sergeant, I've forgotten something important. I must go back to see Dr. Cardigan. You have my authority to give McTrigger his liberty at once!'"

O'Connor paused, as if expecting some expression of disbelief from Kent. When none came, he demanded,

"Was that according to the Criminal Code? Was it, Kent?"

"Not exactly. But, coming from the S. O. D., it was law."

"And I obeyed it," grunted the staff-sergeant. "And if you could have seen McTrigger! When I told him he was free, and unlocked his cell, he came out of it gropingly, like a blind man. And he would go no farther than the Inspector's office. He said he would wait there for him."

"And Kedsty?"

O'Connor jumped from his chair and began thumping back and forth across the room again. "Fol-

lowed the girl," he exploded. "He couldn't have done anything else. He lied to me about Cardigan. There wouldn't be anything mysterious about it if he wasn't sixty and she less than twenty. She was pretty enough! But it wasn't her beauty that made him turn white there in the path. Not on your life it wasn't! I tell you he aged ten years in as many seconds. There was something in that girl's eyes more terrifying to him than a leveled gun, and after he'd looked into them, his first thought was of McTrigger, the man you're saving from the hangman. It's queer, Kent. The whole business is queer. And the queerest of it all is your confession."

"Yes, it's all very funny," agreed Kent. "That's what I've been telling myself right along, old man. You see, a little thing like a bullet changed it all. For if the bullet hadn't got me, I assure you I wouldn't have given Kedsty that confession, and an innocent man would have been hanged. As it is, Kedsty is shocked, demoralized. I'm the first man to soil the honor of the finest Service on the face of the earth, and I'm in Kedsty's division. Quite natural that he should be upset. And as for the girl——"

He shrugged his shoulders and tried to laugh. "Perhaps she came in this morning with one of the up-river scows and was merely taking a little constitutional," he suggested. "Didn't you ever notice, O'Connor, that in a certain light under poplar trees one's face is sometimes ghastly?"

"Yes, I've noticed it, when the trees are in full leaf, but not when they're just opening, Jimmy. It was the girl. Her eyes shattered every nerve in him. And his first words were an order for me to free McTrigger, coupled with the lie that he was coming back to see Cardigan. And if you could have seen her eyes when she turned them on me! They were blue—blue as violets—but shooting fire. I could imagine black eyes like that, but not blue ones. Kedsty simply wilted in their blaze. And there was a reason—I know it—a reason that sent his mind like lightning to the man in the cell!"

"Now, that you leave me out of it, the thing begins to get interesting," said Kent. "It's a matter of the relationship of this blonde girl and——"

"She isn't blonde—and I'm not leaving you out of it," interrupted O'Connor. "I never saw anything so black in my life as her hair. It was magnificent. If you saw that girl once, you would never forget her again as long as you lived. She has never been in Athabasca Landing before, or anywhere near here. If she had, we surely would have heard about her. She came for a purpose, and I believe that purpose was accomplished when Kedsty gave me the order to free McTrigger."

"That's possible, and probable," agreed Kent. "I always said you were the best clue-analyst in the force, Bucky. But I don't see where I come in."

O'Connor smiled grimly. "You don't? Well, I

may be both blind and a fool, and perhaps a little excited. But it seemed to me that from the moment Inspector Kedsty laid his eyes on that girl he was a little too anxious to let McTrigger go and hang you in his place. A little too anxious, Kent."

The irony of the thing brought a hard smile to Kent's lips as he nodded for the cigars. "I'll try one of these on top of the pipe," he said, nipping off the end of the cigar with his teeth. "And you forget that I'm not going to hang, Bucky. Cardigan has given me until tomorrow night. Perhaps until the next day. Did you see Rossand's fleet leaving for up north? It made me think of three years ago!"

O'Connor was gripping his hand again. The coldness of it sent a chill into the staff-sergeant's heart. He rose and looked through the upper part of the window, so that the twitching in his throat was hidden from Kent. Then he went to the door.

"I'll see you again tomorrow," he said. "And if I find out anything more about the girl, I'll report."

He tried to laugh, but there was a tremble in his voice, a break in the humor he attempted to force.

Kent listened to the tramp of his heavy feet as they went down the hall.

CHAPTER III

AGAIN the world came back to Kent, the world that lay just beyond his open window. But scarcely had O'Connor gone when it began to change, and in spite of his determination to keep hold of his nerve Kent felt creeping up with that change a thing that was oppressive and smothering. Swiftly the distant billowings of the forests were changing their tones and colors under the darkening approach of storm. The laughter of the hills and ridges went out. The shimmer of spruce and cedar and balsam turned to a somber black. The flashing gold and silver of birch and poplar dissolved into a ghostly and unanimated gray that was almost invisible. A deepening and somber gloom spread itself like a veil over the river that only a short time before had reflected the glory of the sun in the faces of dark-visaged men of the Company brigade. And with the gloom came steadily nearer a low rumbling of thunder.

For the first time since the mental excitement of his confession Kent felt upon him an appalling loneliness. He still was not afraid of death, but a part of his philosophy was gone. It was, after all, a difficult thing to die alone. He felt that the pressure in his chest was perceptibly greater than it had been an

hour or two before, and the thought grew upon him that it would be a terrible thing for the "explosion" to come when the sun was not shining. He wanted O'Connor back again. He had the desire to call out for Cardigan. He would have welcomed Father Layonne with a glad cry. Yet more than all else would he have had at his side in these moments of distress a woman. For the storm, as it massed heavier and nearer, filling the earth with its desolation, bridged vast spaces for him, and he found himself suddenly face to face with the might-have-beens of yesterday.

He saw, as he had never guessed before, the immeasurable gulf between helplessness and the wild, brute freedom of man, and his soul cried out—not for adventure, not for the savage strength of life—but for the presence of a creature frailer than himself, yet in the gentle touch of whose hand lay the might of all humanity.

He struggled with himself. He remembered that Dr. Cardigan had told him there would be moments of deep depression, and he tried to fight himself out of the grip of this that was on him. There was a bell at hand, but he refused to use it, for he sensed his own cowardice. His cigar had gone out, and he relighted it. He made an effort to bring his mind back to O'Connor, and the mystery girl, and Kedsty. He tried to visualize McTrigger, the man he had saved from the hangman, waiting for Kedsty in the office at barracks. He pictured the girl, as O'Connor had

described her, with her black hair and blue eyes—and then the storm broke.

The rain came down in a deluge, and scarcely had it struck when the door opened and Cardigan hurried in to close the window. He remained for half an hour, and after that young Mercer, one of his two assistants, came in at intervals. Late in the afternoon it began to clear up, and Father Layonne returned with papers properly made out for Kent's signature. He was with Kent until sundown, when Mercer came in with supper.

Between that hour and ten o'clock Kent observed a vigilance on the part of Dr. Cardigan which struck him as being unusual. Four times he listened with the stethoscope at his chest, but when Kent asked the question which was in his mind, Cardigan shook his head.

"It's no worse, Kent. I don't think it will happen tonight."

In spite of this assurance Kent was positive there was in Cardigan's manner an anxiety of a different quality than he had perceived earlier in the day. The thought was a definite and convincing one. He believed that Cardigan was smoothing the way with a professional lie.

He had no desire to sleep. His light was turned low, and his window was open again, for the night had cleared. Never had air tasted sweeter to him than that which came in through his window. The

little bell in his watch tinkled the hour of eleven, when he heard Cardigan's door close for a last time across the hall. After that everything was quiet. He drew himself nearer to the window, so that by leaning forward he could rest himself partly on the sill. He loved the night. The mystery and lure of those still hours of darkness when the world slept had never ceased to hold their fascination for him. Night and he were friends. He had discovered many of its secrets. A thousand times he had walked hand in hand with the spirit of it, approaching each time a little nearer to the heart of it, mastering its life, its sound, the whispering languages of that "other side of life" which rises quietly and as if in fear to live and breathe long after the sun has gone out. To him it was more wonderful than day.

And this night that lay outside his window now was magnificent. Storm had washed the atmosphere between earth and sky, and it seemed as though the stars had descended nearer to his forests, shining in golden constellations. The moon was coming up late, and he watched the ruddy glow of it as it rode up over the wilderness, a splendid queen entering upon a stage already prepared by the lesser satellites for her coming. No longer was Kent oppressed or afraid. In still deeper inhalations he drank the night air into his lungs, and in him there seemed to grow slowly a new strength. His eyes and ears were wide open and attentive. The town was asleep, but a few lights

burned dimly here and there along the river's edge, and occasionally a lazy sound came up to him—the clink of a scow chain, the bark of a dog, the rooster crowing. In spite of himself he smiled at that. Old Duperow's rooster was a foolish bird and always crowed himself hoarse when the moon was bright. And in front of him, not far away, were two white, lightning-shriven spruce stubs standing like ghosts in the night. In one of these a pair of owls had nested, and Kent listened to the queer, chuckling notes of their honeymooning and the flutter of their wings as they darted out now and then in play close to his window. And then suddenly he heard the sharp snap of their beaks. An enemy was prowling near, and the owls were giving warning. He thought he heard a step. In another moment or two the step was unmistakable. Some one was approaching his window from the end of the building. He leaned over the sill and found himself staring into O'Connor's face.

"These confounded feet of mine!" grunted the staff-sergeant. "Were you asleep, Kent?"

"Wide-awake as those owls," assured Kent.

O'Connor drew up to the window. "I saw your light and thought you were awake," he said. "I wanted to make sure Cardigan wasn't with you. I don't want him to know I am here. And—if you don't mind—will you turn off the light? Kedsty is awake, too—as wide-awake as the owls."

Kent reached out a hand, and his room was in

darkness except for the glow of moon and stars. O'Connor's bulk at the window shut out a part of this. His face was half in gloom.

"It's a crime to come to you like this, Kent," he said, keeping his big voice down to a whisper. "But I had to. It's my last chance. And I know there's something wrong. Kedsty is getting me out of the way—because I was with him when he met the girl over in the poplar bush. I'm detailed on special duty up at Fort Simpson, two thousand miles by water if it's a foot! It means six months or a year. We leave in the motor boat at dawn to overtake Rossand and his outfit, so I had to take this chance of seeing you. I hesitated until I knew that some one was awake in your room."

"I'm glad you came," said Kent warmly. "And—good God, how I would like to go with you, Bucky! If it wasn't for this thing in my chest, ballooning up for an explosion——"

"I wouldn't be going," interrupted O'Connor in a low voice. "If you were on your feet, Kent, there are a number of things that wouldn't be happening. Something mighty queer has come over Kedsty since this morning. He isn't the Kedsty you knew yesterday or for the last ten years. He's nervous, and I miss my guess if he isn't constantly on the watch for some one. And he's afraid of me. I know it. He's afraid of me because I saw him go to pieces when he met that girl. Fort Simpson is simply a frame-up to get

me away for a time. He tried to smooth the edge off the thing by promising me an inspectorship within the year. That was this afternoon, just before the storm. Since then——"

O'Connor turned and faced the moonlight for a moment.

"Since then I've been on a still-hunt for the girl and Sandy McTrigger," he added. "And they've disappeared, Kent. I guess McTrigger just melted away into the woods. But it's the girl that puzzles me. I've questioned every scow *cheman* at the Landing. I've investigated every place where she might have got food or lodging, and I bribed Mooie, the old trailer, to search the near-by timber. The unbelievable part of it isn't her disappearance. It's the fact that not a soul in Athabasca Landing has seen her! Sounds incredible, doesn't it? And then, Kent, the big hunch came to me. Remember how we've always played up to the big hunch? And this one struck me strong. I think I know where the girl is."

Kent, forgetful of his own impending doom, was deeply interested in the thrill of O'Connor's mystery. He had begun to visualize the situation. More than once they had worked out enigmas of this kind together, and the staff-sergeant saw the old, eager glow in his eyes. And Kent chuckled joyously in that thrill of the game of man-hunting, and said:

"Kedsty is a bachelor and doesn't even so much as look at a woman. But he likes home life——"

"And has built himself a log bungalow somewhat removed from the town," added O'Connor.

"And his Chinaman cook and housekeeper is away."

"And the bungalow is closed, or supposed to be."

"Except at night, when Kedsty goes there to sleep."

O'Connor's hand gripped Kent's. "Jimmy, there never was a team in N Division that could beat us. The girl is hiding at Kedsty's place!"

"But why *hiding?*" insisted Kent. "She hasn't committed a crime."

O'Connor sat silent for a moment. Kent could hear him stuffing the bowl of his pipe.

"It's simply the big hunch," he grunted. "It's got hold of me, Kent, and I can't throw it off. Why, man——"

He lighted a match in the cup of his hands, and Kent saw his face. There was more than uncertainty in the hard, set lines of it.

"You see, I went back to the poplars again after I left you today," O'Connor went on. "I found her footprints. She had turned off the trail, and in places they were very clear.

"She had on high-heeled shoes, Kent—those Frenchy things—and I swear her feet can't be much bigger than a baby's! I found where Kedsty caught up with her, and the moss was pretty well beaten down. He returned through the poplars, but the girl went on and into the edge of the spruce. I lost her trail there. By traveling in that timber it was possible

for her to reach Kedsty's bungalow without being seen. It must have been difficult going, with shoes half as big as my hand and heels two inches high! And I've been wondering, why didn't she wear bush-country shoes or moccasins?"

"Because she came from the South and not the North," suggested Kent. "Probably up from Edmonton."

"Exactly. And Kedsty wasn't expecting her, was he? If he had been, that first sight of her wouldn't have shattered every nerve in his body. That's why the big hunch won't let loose of me, Kent. From the moment he saw her, he was a different man. His attitude toward you changed instantly. If he could save you now by raising his little finger, he wouldn't do it, simply because it's absolutely necessary for him to have an excuse for freeing McTrigger. Your confession came at just the psychological moment. The girl's unspoken demand there in the poplars was that he free McTrigger, and it was backed up by a threat which Kedsty understood and which terrified him to his marrow. McTrigger must have seen him afterward, for he waited at the office until Kedsty came. I don't know what passed between them. Constable Doyle says they were together for half an hour. Then McTrigger walked out of barracks, and no one has seen him since. It's mighty queer. The whole thing is queer. And the queerest part of the whole business is this sudden commission of mine at Fort Simpson."

Kent leaned back against his pillows. His breath came in a series of short, hacking coughs. In the star glow O'Connor saw his face grow suddenly haggard and tired-looking, and he leaned far in so that in both his own hands he held one of Kent's.

"I'm tiring you, Jimmy," he said huskily. "Good-by, old pal! I—I——" He hesitated and then lied steadily. "I'm going up to take a look around Kedsty's place. I won't be gone more than half an hour and will stop on my way back. If you're asleep——"

"I won't be asleep," said Kent.

O'Connor's hands gripped closer. "Good-by, Jimmy."

"Good-by." And then, as O'Connor stepped back into the night, Kent's voice called after him softly: "I'll be with you on the long trip, Bucky. Take care of yourself—always."

O'Connor's answer was a sob, a sob that rose in his throat like a great fist, and choked him, and filled his eyes with scalding tears that shut out the glow of moon and stars. And he did not go toward Kedsty's, but trudged heavily in the direction of the river, for he knew that Kent had called his lie, and that they had said their last farewell.

CHAPTER IV

IT was a long time after O'Connor had gone before Kent at last fell asleep. It was a slumber weighted with the restlessness of a brain fighting to the last against exhaustion and the inevitable end. A strange spirit seemed whirling Kent back through the years he had lived, even to the days of his boyhood, leaping from crest to crest, giving to him swift and passing visions of valleys almost forgotten, of happenings and things long ago faded and indistinct in his memory. Vividly his dreams were filled with ghosts—ghosts that were transformed, as his spirit went back to them, until they were riotous with life and pulsating with the red blood of reality. He was a boy again, playing three-old-cat in front of the little old red brick schoolhouse half a mile from the farm where he was born, and where his mother had died.

And Skinny Hill, dead many years ago, was his partner at the bat—lovable Skinny, with his smirking grin and his breath that always smelled of the most delicious onions ever raised in Ohio. And then, at dinner hour, he was trading some of his mother's cucumber pickles for some of Skinny's onions—two onions for a pickle, and never a change in the price. And he played old-fashioned casino with his mother, and

they were picking blackberries together in the woods, and he killed over again a snake that he had clubbed to death more than twenty years ago, while his mother ran away and screamed and then sat down and cried.

He had worshiped that mother, and the spirit of his dreams did not let him look down into the valley where she lay dead, under a little white stone in the country cemetery a thousand miles away, with his father close beside her. But it gave him a passing thrill of the days in which he had fought his way through college—and then it brought him into the North, his beloved North.

For hours the wilderness was heavy about Kent. He moved restlessly, at times he seemed about to awaken, but always he slipped back into the slumberous arms of his forests. He was on the trail in the cold, gray beginning of Winter, and the glow of his campfire made a radiant patch of red glory in the heart of the night, and close to him in that glow sat O'Connor. He was behind dogs and sledge, fighting storm; dark and mysterious streams rippled under his canoe; he was on the Big River, O'Connor with him again—and then, suddenly, he was holding a blazing gun in his hand, and he and O'Connor stood with their backs to a rack, facing the bloodthirsty rage of McCaw and his free-traders. The roar of the guns half roused him, and after that came pleasanter things—the droning of wind in the spruce tops, the singing of swollen streams in Springtime, the songs of birds, the sweet

smells of life, the glory of life as he had lived it, he and O'Connor. In the end, half between sleep and wakefulness, he was fighting a smothering pressure on his chest. It was an oppressive and torturing thing, like the tree that had fallen on him over in the Jackfish country, and he felt himself slipping off into darkness. Suddenly there was a gleam of light. He opened his eyes. The sun was flooding in at his window, and the weight on his chest was the gentle pressure of Cardigan's stethoscope.

In spite of the physical stress of the phantoms which his mind has conceived, Kent awakened so quietly that Cardigan was not conscious of the fact until he raised his head. There was something in his face which he tried to conceal, but Kent caught it before it was gone. There were dark hollows under his eyes. He was a bit haggard, as though he had spent a sleepless night. Kent pulled himself up, squinting at the sun and grinning apologetically. He had slept well along into the day, and——

He caught himself with a sudden grimace of pain. A flash of something hot and burning swept through his chest. It was like a knife. He opened his mouth to breathe in the air. The pressure inside him was no longer the pressure of a stethoscope. It was real.

Cardigan, standing over him, was trying to look cheerful. "Too much of the night air, Kent," he explained. "That will pass away—soon."

It seemed to Kent that Cardigan gave an almost im-

perceptible emphasis to the word "soon," but he asked no question. He was quite sure that he understood, and he knew how unpleasant for Cardigan the answer to it would be. He fumbled under his pillow for his watch. It was nine o'clock. Cardigan was moving about uneasily, arranging the things on the table and adjusting the shade at the window. For a few moments, with his back to Kent, he stood without moving. Then he turned, and said:

"Which will you have, Kent—a wash-up and breakfast, or a visitor?"

"I am not hungry, and I don't feel like soap and water just now. Who's the visitor? Father Layonne or—Kedsty?"

"Neither. It's a lady."

"Then I'd better have the soap and water! Do you mind telling me who it is?"

Cardigan shook his head. "I don't know. I've never seen her before. She came this morning while I was still in pajamas, and has been waiting ever since. I told her to come back again, but she insisted that she would remain until you were awake. She has been very patient for two hours."

A thrill which he made no effort to conceal leaped through Kent. "Is she a young woman?" he demanded eagerly. "Wonderful black hair, blue eyes, wears high-heeled shoes just about half as big as your hand—and very beautiful?"

"All of that," nodded Cardigan. "I even noticed

the shoes, Jimmy. A very beautiful young woman!"

"Please let her come in," said Kent. "Mercer scrubbed me last night, and I feel fairly fit. She'll forgive this beard, and I'll apologize for your sake. What is her name?"

"I asked her, and she didn't seem to hear. A little later Mercer asked her, and he said she just looked at him for a moment and he froze. She is reading a volume of my Plutarch's 'Lives'—actually reading it. I know it by the way she turns the pages!"

Kent drew himself up higher against his pillows and faced the door when Cardigan went out. In a flash all that O'Connor had said swept back upon him—this girl, Kedsty, the mystery of it all. Why had she come to see him? What could be the motive of her visit—unless it was to thank him for the confession that had given Sandy McTrigger his freedom? O'Connor was right. She was deeply concerned in McTrigger and had come to express her gratitude. He listened. Distant footsteps sounded in the hall. They approached quickly and paused outside his door. A hand moved the latch, but for a moment the door did not open. He heard Cardigan's voice, then Cardigan's footsteps retreating down the hall. His heart thumped. He could not remember when he had been so upset over an unimportant thing.

CHAPTER V

THE latch moved slowly, and with its movement came a gentle tap on the panel.

"Come in," he said

The next instant he was staring. The girl had entered and closed the door behind her. O'Connor's picture stood in flesh and blood before him. The girl's eyes met his own. They were like glorious violets, as O'Connor had said, but they were not the eyes he had expected to see. They were the wide-open, curious eyes of a child. He had visualized them as pools of slumbering flame—the idea O'Connor had given him—and they were the opposite of that. Their one emotion seemed to be the emotion roused by an overwhelming, questioning curiosity. They were apparently not regarding him as a dying human being, but as a creature immensely interesting to look upon. In place of the gratitude he had anticipated, they were filled with a great, wondering interrogation, and there was not the slightest hint of embarrassment in their gaze. For a space it seemed to Kent that he saw nothing but those wonderful, dispassionate eyes looking at him. Then he saw the rest of her—her amazing hair, her pale, exquisite face, the slimness and beauty of her as she stood with her back to the door, one hand

still resting on the latch. He had never seen anything quite like her. He might have guessed that she was eighteen, or twenty, or twenty-two. Her hair, wreathed in shimmering, velvety coils from the back to the crown of her head, struck him as it had struck O'Connor, as unbelievable. The glory of it gave to her an appearance of height which she did not possess, for she was not tall, and her slimness added to the illusion.

And then, greatly to his embarrassment in the next instant, his eyes went to her feet. Again O'Connor was right—tiny feet, high-heeled pumps, ravishingly turned ankles showing under a skirt of some fluffy brown stuff or other——

Correcting himself, his face flushed red. The faintest tremble of a smile was on the girl's lips. She looked down, and for the first time he saw what O'Connor had seen, the sunlight kindling slumberous fires in her hair.

Kent tried to say something, but before he succeeded she had taken possession of the chair near his bedside.

"I have been waiting a long time to see you," she said. "You are James Kent, aren't you?"

"Yes, I'm Jim Kent. I'm sorry Dr. Cardigan kept you waiting. If I had known——"

He was getting a grip on himself again, and smiled at her. He noticed the amazing length of her dark lashes, but the violet eyes behind them did not smile

back at him. The tranquillity of their gaze was disconcerting. It was as if she had not quite made up her mind about him yet and was still trying to classify him in the museum of things she had known.

"He should have awakened me," Kent went on, trying to keep himself from slipping once more. "It isn't polite to keep a young lady waiting two hours!"

This time the blue eyes made him feel that his smile was a maudlin grin.

"Yes—you are different." She spoke softly, as if expressing the thought to herself. "That is what I came to find out, if you were different. You are dying?"

"My God—yes—I'm dying!" gasped Kent. "According to Dr. Cardigan I'm due to pop off this minute. Aren't you a little nervous, sitting so near to a man who's ready to explode while you're looking at him?"

For the first time the eyes changed. She was not facing the window, yet a glow like the glow of sunlight flashed into them, soft, luminous, almost laughing.

"No, it doesn't frighten me," she assured him. "I have always thought I should like to see a man die—not quickly, like drowning or being shot, but slowly, an inch at a time. But I shouldn't like to see *you* die."

"I'm glad," breathed Kent. "It's a great satisfaction to me."

"Yet I shouldn't be frightened if you did."

"Oh!"

Kent drew himself up straighter against his pillows. He had been a man of many adventures. He had faced almost every conceivable kind of shock. But this was a new one. He stared into the blue eyes, tongueless and mentally dazed. They were cool and sweet and not at all excited. And he knew that she spoke the truth. Not by a quiver of those lovely lashes would she betray either fear or horror if he popped off right there. It was astonishing.

Something like resentment shot for an instant into his bewildered brain. Then it was gone, and in a flash it came upon him that she was but uttering his own philosophy of life, showing him life's cheapness, life's littleness, the absurdity of being distressed by looking upon the light as it flickered out. And she was doing it, not as a philosopher, but with the beautiful unconcern of a child.

Suddenly, as if impelled by an emotion in direct contradiction to her apparent lack of sympathy, she reached out a hand and placed it on Kent's forehead. It was another shock. It was not a professional touch, but a soft, cool little pressure that sent a comforting thrill through him. The hand was there for only a moment, and she withdrew it to entwine the slim fingers with those of the others in her lap.

"You have no fever," she said. "What makes you think you are dying?"

Kent explained what was happening inside him.

He was completely shunted off his original track of thought and anticipation. He had expected to ask for at least a mutual introduction when his visitor came into his room, and had anticipated taking upon himself the position of a polite inquisitor. In spite of O'Connor, he had not thought she would be quite so pretty. He had not believed her eyes would be so beautiful, or their lashes so long, or the touch of her hand so pleasantly unnerving. And now, in place of asking for her name and the reason for her visit, he became an irrational idiot, explaining to her certain matters of physiology that had to do with aortas and aneurismal sacs. He had finished before the absurdity of the situation dawned upon him, and with absurdity came the humor of it. Even dying, Kent could not fail to see the funny side of a thing. It struck him as suddenly as had the girl's beauty and her bewildering and unaffected ingenuousness.

Looking at him, that same glow of mysterious questioning in her eyes, the girl found him suddenly laughing straight into her face.

"This is funny. It's very funny, Miss—— Miss——"

"Marette," she supplied, answering his hesitation.

"It's funny, Miss Marette."

"Not Miss Marette. Just Marette," she corrected.

"I say, it's funny," he tried again. "You see, it's not so terribly pleasant as you might think to—er—be here, where I am, dying. And last night I thought

about the finest thing in the world would be to have a woman beside me, a woman who'd be sort of sympathetic, you know, ease the thing off a little, maybe say she was sorry. And then the Lord answers my prayer, and *you* come—and you sort of give me the impression that you made the appointment with yourself to see how a fellow looks when he pops off."

The shimmer of light came into the blue eyes again. She seemed to have done with her mental analysis of him, and he saw that a bit of color was creeping into her cheeks, pale when she had entered the room.

"You wouldn't be the first I've seen pop off," she assured him. "There have been a number, and I've never cried very much. I'd rather see a man die than some animals. But I shouldn't like to see *you* do it. Does that comfort you—like the woman you prayed the Lord for?"

"It does," gasped Kent. "But why the devil, Miss Marette——"

"Marette," she corrected again.

"Yes, Marette—why the devil have you come to see me at just the moment I'm due to explode? And what's your other name, and how old are you, and what do you want of me?"

"I haven't any other name, I'm twenty, and I came to get acquainted with you and see what you are like."

"Bully!" exclaimed Kent. "We're getting there fast! And now, why?"

The girl drew her chair a few inches nearer, and

for a moment Kent thought that her lovely mouth was trembling on the edge of a smile.

"Because you have lied so splendidly to save another man who was about to die."

"Et tu, Brute!" sighed Kent, leaning back against his pillows. "Isn't it possible for a decent man to kill another man and not be called a liar when he tells about it? Why do so many believe that I lie?"

"They don't," said the girl. "They believe you—now. You have gone so completely into the details of the murder in your confession that they are quite convinced. It would be too bad if you lived, for you surely would be hanged. Your lie sounds and reads like the truth. But I know it is a lie. You did not kill John Barkley."

"And the reason for your suspicion?"

For fully half a minute the girl's eyes rested on his own. Again they seemed to be looking through him and into him. "Because I know the man who *did* kill him," she said quietly, "and it was not you."

Kent made a mighty effort to appear calm. He reached for a cigar from the box that Cardigan had placed on his bed, and nibbled the end of it. "Has some one else been confessing?" he asked.

She shook her head the slightest bit.

"Did you—er—see this other gentleman kill John Barkley?" he insisted.

"No."

"Then I must answer you as I have answered at

least one other. I killed John Barkley. If you suspect some other person, your suspicion is wrong."

"What a splendid liar!" she breathed softly. "Don't you believe in God?"

Kent winced. "In a large, embracing sense, yes," he said. "I believe in Him, for instance, as revealed to our senses in all that living, growing glory you see out there through the window Nature and I have become pretty good pals, and you see I've sort of built up a mother goddess to worship instead of a he-god. Sacrilege, maybe, but it's a great comfort at times. But you didn't come to talk religion?"

The lovely head bent still nearer him. He felt an impelling desire to put up his hand and touch her shining hair, as she laid her hand on his forehead.

"I know who killed John Barkley," she insisted. "I know how and when and why he was killed. Please tell me the truth. I want to know. Why did you confess to a crime which you did not commit?"

Kent took time to light his cigar. The girl watched him closely, almost eagerly.

"I may be mad," he said. "It is possible for any human being to be mad and not know it. That's the funny part about insanity. But if I'm not insane, I killed Barkley; if I didn't kill him, I must be insane, for I'm very well convinced that I did. Either that, or you are insane. I have my suspicions that you are. Would a sane person wear pumps with heels like those up here?" He pointed accusingly to the floor.

For the first time the girl smiled, openly, frankly, gloriously. It was as if her heart had leaped forth for an instant and had greeted him. And then, like sunlight shadowed by cloud, the smile was gone. "You are a brave man," she said. "You are splendid. I hate men. But I think if you lived very long, I should love you. I will believe that you killed Barkley. You compel me to believe it. You confessed, when you found you were going to die, that an innocent man might be saved. Wasn't that it?"

Kent nodded weakly. "That's it. I hate to think of it that way, but I guess it's true. I confessed because I knew I was going to die. Otherwise I am quite sure that I should have let the other fellow take my medicine for me. You must think I am a beast."

"All men are beasts," she agreed quickly. "But you are—a different kind of beast. I like you. If there were a chance, I might fight for you. I can fight." She held up her two small hands, half smiling at him again.

"But not with those," he exclaimed "I think you would fight with your eyes. O'Connor told me they half killed Kedsty when you met them in the poplar grove yesterday."

He had expected that the mention of Inspector Kedsty's name would disturb her. It had no effect that he could perceive.

"O'Connor was the big, red-faced man with Mr. Kedsty?"

"Yes, my trail partner. He came to me yesterday and raved about your eyes. They *are* beautiful; I've never seen eyes half so lovely. But that wasn't what struck Bucky so hard. It was the effect they had on Kedsty. He said they shattered every nerve in Kedsty's body, and Kedsty isn't the sort to get easily frightened. And the queer part of it was that the instant you had gone, he gave O'Connor an order to free McTrigger—and then turned and followed you. All the rest of that day O'Connor tried to discover something about you at the Landing. He couldn't find hide nor hair—I beg pardon!—I mean he couldn't find out anything about you at all. We made up our minds that for some reason or other you were hiding up at Kedsty's bungalow. You don't mind a fellow saying all this—when he is going to pop off soon—do you?"

He was half frightened at the directness with which he had expressed the thing. He would gladly have buried his own curiosity and all of O'Connor's suspicions for another moment of her hand on his forehead. But it was out, and he waited.

She was looking down, her fingers twisting some sort of tasseled dress ornament in her lap, and Kent mentally measured the length of her lashes with a foot rule in mind. They were superb, and in the thrill of his admiration he would have sworn they were an inch long. She looked up suddenly and caught

the glow in his eyes and the flush that lay under the tan of his cheeks. Her own color had deepened a little.

"What if you shouldn't die?" she asked him bluntly, as if she had not heard a word of all he had said about Kedsty. "What would you do?"

"I'm going to."

"But if you shouldn't?"

Kent shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose I'd have to take my medicine. You're not going?"

She had straightened up and was sitting on the edge of her chair. "Yes, I'm going. I'm afraid of my eyes. I may look at you as I looked at Mr. Kedsty, and then—pop you'd go, quick! And I don't want to be here when you die!"

He heard a soft little note of laughter in her throat. It sent a chill through him. What an adorable, bloodthirsty little wretch she was! He stared at her bent head, at the shining coils of her wonderful hair. Undone, he could see it completely hiding her. And it was so soft and warm that again he was tempted to reach out and touch it. She was wonderful, and yet it was not possible that she had a heart. Her apparent disregard of the fact that he was a dying man was almost diabolic. There was no sympathy in the expression of her violet eyes as she looked at him. She was even making fun of the fact that he was about to die!

She stood up, surveying for the first time the room in which she had been sitting. Then she turned to the window and looked out. She reminded Kent of a beautiful young willow that had grown at the edge of a stream, exquisite, slender, strong. He could have picked her up in his arms as easily as a child, yet he sensed in the lithe beauty of her body forces that could endure magnificently. The careless poise of her head fascinated him. For that head and the hair that crowned it he knew that half the women of the earth would have traded precious years of their lives.

And then, without turning toward him, she said, "Some day, when I die, I wish I might have as pleasant a room as this."

"I hope you never die," he replied devoutly.

She came back and stood for a moment beside him.

"I have had a very pleasant time," she said, as though he had given her a special sort of entertainment. "It's too bad you are going to die. I'm sure we should have been good friends. Aren't you?"

"Yes, very sure. If you had only arrived sooner——"

"And I shall always think of you as a different kind of man-beast," she interrupted him. "It is really true that I shouldn't like to see you die. I want to get away before it happens. Would you care to have me kiss you?"

For an instant Kent felt that his aorta was about

to give away. "I—I would," he gasped huskily.

"Then—close your eyes, please."

He obeyed. She bent over him. He felt the soft touch of her hands and caught for an instant the perfume of her face and hair, and then the thrill of her lips pressed warm and soft upon his.

She was not flushed or embarrassed when he looked at her again. It was as if she had kissed a baby and was wondering at its red face. "I've only kissed three men before you," she avowed. "It is strange. I never thought I should do it again. And now, good-by!" She moved quickly to the door.

"Wait," he cried plaintively. "Please wait. I want to know your name. It is Marette——"

"Radisson," she finished for him. "Marette Radisson, and I come from away off there, from a place we call the Valley of Silent Men." She was pointing into the north.

"The North!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, it is far north. Very far."

Her hand was on the latch. The door opened slowly.

"Wait," he pleaded again. "You must not go."

"Yes, I must go. I have remained too long. I am sorry I kissed you. I shouldn't have done that. But I had to because you are such a splendid liar!"

The door opened quickly and closed behind her. He heard her steps almost running down the hall,

where not long ago he had listened to the last of O'Connor's.

And then there was silence, and in that silence he heard her words again, drumming like little hammers in his head, *"Because you are such a splendid liar!"*

CHAPTER VI

JAMES KENT, among his other qualities good and bad, possessed a merciless opinion of his own shortcomings, but never, in that opinion, had he fallen so low as in the interval which immediately followed the closing of his door behind the mysterious girl who had told him that her name was Marette Radisson. No sooner was she gone than the overwhelming superiority of her childlike cleverness smote him until, ashamed of himself, he burned red in his aloneness.

He, Sergeant Kent, the coolest man on the force next to Inspector Kedsty, the most dreaded of catechists when questioning criminals, the man who had won the reputation of facing quietly and with deadly sureness the most menacing of dangers, had been beaten—horribly beaten—by a girl! And yet, in defeat, an irrepressible and at times distorted sense of humor made him give credit to the victor. The shame of the thing was his acknowledgment that a bit of feminine beauty had done the trick. He had made fun of O'Connor when the big staff-sergeant had described the effect of the girl's eyes on Inspector Kedsty. And, now, if O'Connor could know of what had happened here——

And then, like a rubber ball, that saving sense of humor bounced up out of the mess, and Kent found

himself chuckling as his face grew cooler. His visitor had come, and she had gone, and he knew no more about her than when she had entered his room, except that her very pretty name was Marette Radisson. He was just beginning to think of the questions he had wanted to ask, a dozen, half a hundred of them—more definitely who she was; how and why she had come to Athabasca Landing; her interest in Sandy McTrigger; the mysterious relationship that must surely exist between her and Inspector Kedsty; and, chiefly, her real motive in coming to him when she knew that he was dying. He comforted himself by the assurance that he would have learned these things had she not left him so suddenly. He had not expected that.

The question which seated itself most insistently in his mind was, why had she come? Was it, after all, merely a matter of curiosity? Was her relationship to Sandy McTrigger such that inquisitiveness alone had brought her to see the man who had saved him? Surely she had not been urged by a sense of gratitude, for in no way had she given expression to that. On his death-bed she had almost made fun of him. And she could not have come as a messenger from McTrigger, or she would have left her message. For the first time he began to doubt that she knew the man at all, in spite of the strange thing that had happened under O'Connor's eyes. But she must know Kedsty. She had made no answer to his half-accusation that

she was hiding up at the Inspector's bungalow. He had used that word—"hiding." It should have had an effect. And she was as beautifully unconscious of it as though she had not heard him, and he knew that she had heard him very distinctly. It was then that she had given him that splendid view of her amazingly long lashes and had countered softly,

"What if you shouldn't die?"

Kent felt himself suddenly aglow with an irresistible appreciation of the genius of her subtlety, and with that appreciation came a thrill of deeper understanding. He believed that he knew why she had left him so suddenly. It was because she had seen herself close to the danger-line. There were things which she did not want him to know or question her about, and his daring intimation that she was hiding in Kedsty's bungalow had warned her. Was it possible that Kedsty himself had sent her for some reason which he could not even guess at? Positively it was not because of McTrigger, the man he had saved. At least she would have thanked him in some way. She would not have appeared quite so adorably cold-blooded, quite so sweetly unconscious of the fact that he was dying. If McTrigger's freedom had meant anything to her, she could not have done less than reveal to him a bit of sympathy. And her greatest compliment, if he excepted the kiss, was that she had called him a splendid liar!

Kent grimaced and drew in a deep breath because

of the tightness in his chest. Why was it that every one seemed to disbelieve him? Why was it that even this mysterious girl, whom he had never seen before in his life, politely called him a liar when he insisted that he had killed John Barkley? Was the fact of murder necessarily branded in one's face? If so, he had never observed it. Some of the hardest criminals he had brought in from the down-river country were likable-looking men. There was Horrigan, for instance, who for seven long weeks kept him in good humor with his drollery, though he was bringing him in to be hanged. And there were McTab, and *le Bête Noir*—the Black Beast—a lovable vagabond in spite of his record, and Le Beau, the gentlemanly robber of the wilderness mail, and half a dozen others he could recall without any effort at all. No one called them liars when, like real men, they confessed their crimes when they saw their game was up. To a man they had given up the ghost with their boots on, and Kent respected their memory because of it. And he was dying—and even this stranger girl called him a liar! And no case had ever been more complete than his own. He had gone mercilessly into the condemning detail of it all. It was down in black and white. He had signed it. And still he was disbelieved. It was funny, deuced funny, thought Kent.

Until young Mercer opened the door and came in with his late breakfast, he had forgotten that he had really been hungry when he awakened with Cardigan's

stethoscope at his chest. Mercer had amused him from the first. The pink-faced young Englishman, fresh from the old country, could not conceal in his face and attitude the fact that he was walking in the presence of the gallows whenever he entered the room. He was, as he had confided in Cardigan, "beastly hit up" over the thing. To feed and wash a man who would undoubtedly die, but who would be hanged by the neck until he was dead if he lived, filled him with peculiar and at times conspicuous emotions. It was like attending to a living corpse, if such a thing could be conceived. And Mercer had conceived it. Kent had come to regard him as more or less of a barometer giving away Cardigan's secrets. He had not told Cardigan, but had kept the discovery for his own amusement.

This morning Mercer's face was less pink, and his pale eyes were paler, Kent thought. Also he started to sprinkle sugar on his eggs in place of salt.

Kent laughed and stopped his hand. "You may sugar my eggs when I'm dead, Mercer," he said, "but while I'm alive I want salt on 'em! Do you know, old man, you look bad this morning. Is it because this is my last breakfast?"

"I hope not, sir, I hope not," replied Mercer quickly. "Indeed, I hope you are going to live, sir."

"Thanks!" said Kent dryly. "Where is Cardigan?"

"The Inspector sent a messenger for him, sir. I

think he has gone to see him. Are your eggs properly done, sir?"

"Mercer, if you ever worked in a butler's pantry, for the love of heaven forget it now!" exploded Kent. "I want you to tell me something straight out. How long have I got?"

Mercer fidgeted for a moment, and a shade or two more of the red went out of his face. "I can't say, sir. Doctor Cardigan hasn't told me. But I think not very long, sir. Doctor Cardigan is cut up all in rags this morning. And Father Layonne is coming to see you at any moment."

"Much obliged," nodded Kent, calmly beginning his second egg. "And, by the way, what did you think of the young lady?"

"Ripping, positively ripping!" exclaimed Mercer.

"That's the word," agreed Kent. "Ripping. It sounds like the calico counter in a dry-goods store, but means a lot. Don't happen to know where she is staying or why she is at the Landing, do you?"

He knew that he was asking a foolish question and scarcely expected an answer from Mercer. He was astonished when the other said:

"I heard Doctor Cardigan ask her if we might expect her to honor us with another visit, and she told him it would be impossible, because she was leaving on a down-river scow tonight. Fort Simpson, I think she said she was going to, sir."

"The deuce you say!" cried Kent, spilling a bit of

his coffee in the thrill of the moment. "Why, that's where Staff-Sergeant O'Connor is bound for!"

"So I heard Doctor Cardigan tell her. But she didn't reply to that. She just—went. If you don't mind a little joke in your present condition, sir, I might say that Doctor Cardigan was considerably flayed up over her. A deuced pretty girl, sir, deuced pretty! And I think he was shot through!"

"Now you're human, Mercer. She *was* pretty, wasn't she?"

"Er—yes—stunningly so, Mr. Kent," agreed Mercer, reddening suddenly to the roots of his pasty, blond hair. "I don't mind confessing that in this unusual place her appearance was quite upsetting."

"I agree with you, friend Mercer," nodded Kent. "She upset me. And—see here, old man!—will you do a dying man the biggest favor he ever asked in his life?"

"I should be most happy, sir, most happy."

"It's this," said Kent. "I want to know if that girl actually leaves on the down-river scow tonight. If I'm alive tomorrow morning, will you tell me?"

"I shall do my best, sir."

"Good. It's simply the silly whim of a dying man, Mercer. But I want to be humored in it. And I'm sensitive—like yourself. I don't want Cardigan to know. There's an old Indian named Mooie, who lives in a shack just beyond the sawmill. Give him ten dollars and tell him there is another ten in it if

he sees the business through, and reports properly to you, and keeps his mouth shut afterward. Here—the money is under my pillow."

Kent pulled out a wallet and put fifty dollars in Mercer's hands.

"Buy cigars with the rest of it, old man. It's of no more use to me. And this little trick you are going to pull off is worth it. It's my last fling on earth, you might say."

"Thank you, sir. It is very kind of you."

Mercer belonged to a class of wandering Englishmen typical of the Canadian West, the sort that sometimes made real Canadians wonder why a big and glorious country like their own should cling to the mother country. Ingratiating and obsequiously polite at all times, he gave one the impression of having had splendid training as a servant, yet had this intimation been made to him, he would have become highly indignant. Kent had learned their ways pretty well. He had met them in all sorts of places, for one of their inexplicable characteristics was the recklessness and apparent lack of judgment with which they located themselves. Mercer, for instance, should have held a petty clerical job of some kind in a city, and here he was acting as nurse in the heart of a wilderness!

After Mercer had gone with the breakfast things and the money, Kent recalled a number of his species. And he knew that under their veneer of apparent servility was a thing of courage and daring which needed only

the right kind of incentive to rouse it. And when roused, it was peculiarly efficient in a secretive, artful-dodger sort of way. It would not stand up before a gun. But it would creep under the mouths of guns on a black night. And Kent was positive his fifty dollars would bring him results—if he lived.

Just why he wanted the information he was after, he could not have told himself. It was a pet aphorism between O'Connor and him that they had often traveled to success on the backs of their hunches. And his proposition to Mercer was made on the spur of one of those moments when the spirit of a hunch possessed him. His morning had been one of unexpected excitement, and now he leaned back in an effort to review it and to forget, if he could, the distressing thing that was bound to happen to him within the next few hours. But he could not get away from the thickening in his chest. It seemed growing on him. Now and then he was compelled to make quite an effort to get sufficient air into his lungs.

He found himself wondering if there was a possibility that the girl might return. For a long time he lay thinking about her, and it struck him as incongruous and in bad taste that fate should have left this adventure for his last. If he had met her six months ago—or even three—it was probable that she would so have changed the events of life for him that he would not have got the half-breed's bullet in his chest. He confessed the thing unblushingly. The

wilderness had taken the place of woman for him. It had claimed him, body and soul. He had desired nothing beyond its wild freedom and its never-ending games of chance. He had dreamed, as every man dreams, but realities and not the dreams had been the red pulse of his life. And yet, if this girl had come sooner——

He revisioned for himself over and over again her hair and eyes, the slimness of her as she had stood at the window, the freedom and strength of that slender body, the poise of her exquisite head, and he felt again the thrill of her hand and the still more wonderful thrill of her lips as she had pressed them warmly upon his.

And she was of the North! That was the thought that overwhelmed him. He did not permit himself to believe that she might have told him an untruth. He was confident, if he lived until tomorrow, that Mercer would corroborate his faith in her. He had never heard of a place called the Valley of Silent Men, but it was a big country, and Fort Simpson with its Hudson Bay Company's post and its half-dozen shacks was a thousand miles away. He was not sure that such a place as that valley really existed. It was easier to believe that the girl's home was at Fort Providence, Fort Simpson, Fort Good Hope, or even at Fort McPherson. It was not difficult for him to picture her as the daughter of one of the factor lords of the North. Yet this, upon closer consideration, he

gave up as unreasonable. The word "Fort" did not stand for population, and there were probably not more than fifty white people at all the posts between the Great Slave and the Arctic. She was not one of these, or the fact would have been known at the Landing.

Neither could she be a riverman's daughter, for it was inconceivable that either a riverman or a trapper would have sent this girl down into civilization, where this girl had undoubtedly been. It was that point chiefly which puzzled Kent. She was not only beautiful. She had been tutored in schools that were not taught by wilderness missioners. In her, it seemed to him, he had seen the beauty and the wild freedom of the forests as they had come to him straight out of the heart of an ancient aristocracy that was born nearly two hundred years ago in the old cities of Quebec and Montreal.

His mind flashed back at that thought: he remembered the time when he had sought out every nook and cranny of that ancient town of Quebec, and had stood over graves two centuries old, and deep in his soul had envied the dead the lives they had lived. He had always thought of Quebec as a rare old bit of time-yellowed lace among cities—the heart of the New World as it had once been, still beating, still whispering of its one-time power, still living in the memory of its mellowed romance, its almost forgotten tragedies—a ghost that lived, that still beat back defiantly the destroying modernism that would desecrate its

sacred things. And it pleased him to think of Marette Radisson as the spirit of it, wandering north, and still farther north—even as the spirits of the profaned dead had risen from the Landing to go farther on.

And feeling that the way had at last been made easy for him, Kent smiled out into the glorious day and whispered softly, as if she were standing there, listening to him:

"If I had lived—I would have called you—my Quebec. It's pretty, that name. It stands for a lot. And so do you."

And out in the hall, as Kent whispered those words, stood Father Layonne, with a face that was whiter than the mere presence of death had ever made it before. At his side stood Cardigan, aged ten years since he had placed his stethoscope at Kent's chest that morning. And behind these two were Kedsty, with a face like gray rock, and young Mercer, in whose staring eyes was the horror of a thing he could not yet quite comprehend. Cardigan made an effort to speak and failed. Kedsty wiped his forehead, as he had wiped it the morning of Kent's confession. And Father Layonne, as he went to Kent's door, was breathing softly to himself a prayer.

CHAPTER VII

FROM the window, the glorious day outside, and the vision he had made for himself of Marette Radisson, Kent turned at the sound of a hand at his door and saw it slowly open. He was expecting it. He had read young Mercer like a book. Mercer's nervousness and the increased tightening of the thing in his chest had given him warning. The thing was going to happen soon, and Father Layonne had come. He tried to smile, that he might greet his wilderness friend cheerfully and unafraid. But the smile froze when the door opened and he saw the missioner standing there.

More than once he had accompanied Father Layonne over the threshold of life into the presence of death, but he had never before seen in his face what he saw there now. He stared. The missioner remained in the doorway, hesitating, as if at the last moment a great fear held him back. For an interval the eyes of the two men rested upon each other in a silence that was like the grip of a living thing. Then Father Layonne came quietly into the room and closed the door behind him.

Kent drew a deep breath and tried to grin. "You woke me out of a dream," he said, "a day-dream. I've

had a very pleasant experience this morning, *mon père.*"

"So some one was trying to tell me, Jimmy," replied the little missioner with an effort to smile back.

"Mercer?"

"Yes. He told me about it confidentially. The poor boy must have fallen in love with the young lady."

"So have I, *mon père.* I don't mind confessing it to you. I'm rather glad. And if Cardigan hadn't scheduled me to die——"

"Jimmy," interrupted the missioner quickly, but a bit huskily, "has it ever occurred to you that Doctor Cardigan may be mistaken?"

He had taken one of Kent's hands. His grip tightened. It began to hurt. And Kent, looking into his eyes, found his brain all at once like a black room suddenly illuminated by a flash of fire. Drop by drop the blood went out of his face until it was whiter than Father Layonne's.

"You—you don't—mean——"

"Yes, yes, boy, I mean just that," said the missioner, in a voice so strange that it did not seem to be his own. "You are not going to die, Jimmy. You are going to live!"

"Live!" Kent dropped back against his pillows. "*Live!*" His lips gasped the one word.

He closed his eyes for an instant, and it seemed to him that the world was aflame. And he repeated

the word again, but only his lips formed it, and there came no sound. His senses, strained to the breaking-point to meet the ordeal of death, gave way slowly to the mighty reaction. He felt in those moments like a reeling man. He opened his eyes, and there was a meaningless green haze through the window where the world should have been. But he heard Father Layonne's voice. It seemed a great distance off, but it was very clear. Doctor Cardigan had made an error, it was saying. And Doctor Cardigan, because of that error, was like a man whose heart had been taken out of him. But it was an excusable error.

If there had been an X-ray—— But there had been none. And Doctor Cardigan had made the diagnosis that nine out of ten good surgeons would probably have made. What he had taken to be the aneurismal blood-rush was an exaggerated heart murmur, and the increased thickening in his chest was a simple complication brought about by too much night air. It was too bad the error had happened. But he must not blame Cardigan!

He must not blame Cardigan! Those last words pounded like an endless series of little waves in Kent's brain. He must not blame Cardigan! He laughed, laughed before his dazed senses readjusted themselves, before the world through the window pieced itself into shape again. At least he thought he was laughing. He must—not—blame—Cardigan! What an amazingly stupid thing for Father Layonne to say! Blame

Cardigan for giving him back his life? Blame him for the glorious knowledge that he was not going to die? Blame him for——

Things were coming clearer. Like a bolt slipping into its groove his brain found itself. He saw Father Layonne again, with his white, tense face and eyes in which were still seated the fear and the horror he had seen in the doorway. It was not until then that he gripped fully at the truth.

"I—I see," he said. "You and Cardigan think it would have been better if I had died!"

The missioner was still holding his hand. "I don't know, Jimmy, I don't know. What has happened is terrible."

"But not so terrible as death," cried Kent, suddenly growing rigid against his pillows. "Great God, *mon père,* I want to live! Oh——"

He snatched his hand free and stretched forth both arms to the open window. "Look at it out there! My world again! *My world!* I want to go back to it. It's ten times more precious to me now than it was. Why should I blame Cardigan? *Mon père—mon père*—listen to me. I can say it now, because I've got a right to say it. *I lied.* I didn't kill John Barkley!"

A strange cry fell from Father Layonne's lips. It was a choking cry, a cry, not of rejoicing, but of a grief-stung thing. "Jimmy!"

"I swear it! Great heaven, *mon père,* don't you believe me?"

The missioner had risen. In his eyes and face was another look. It was as if in all his life he had never seen James Kent before. It was a look born suddenly of shock, the shock of amazement, of incredulity, of a new kind of horror. Then swiftly again his countenance changed, and he put a hand on Kent's head.

"God forgive you, Jimmy," he said. "And God help you, too!"

Where a moment before Kent had felt the hot throb of an inundating joy, his heart was chilled now by the thing he sensed in Father Layonne's voice and saw in his face and eyes. It was not entirely disbelief. It was a more hopeless thing than that.

"You do not believe me!" he said.

"It is my religion to believe, Jimmy," replied Father Layonne in a gentle voice into which the old calmness had returned. "I must believe, for your sake. But it is not a matter of human sentiment now, lad. It is the Law! Whatever my heart feels toward you can do you no good. You are——" He hesitated to speak the words.

Then it was that Kent saw fully and clearly the whole monstrous situation. It had taken time for it to fasten itself upon him. In a general way it had been clear to him a few moments before; now, detail by detail, it closed in upon him, and his muscles tightened, and Father Layonne saw his jaw set hard and his hands clench. Death was gone. But the mockery

of it, the grim exultation of the thing over the colossal trick it had played, seemed to din an infernal laughter in his ears. But—he was going to live! That was the one fact that rose above all others. No matter what happened to him a month or six months from now, he was not going to die today. He would live to receive Mercer's report. He would live to stand on his feet again and to fight for the life which he had thrown away. He was, above everything else, a fighting man. It was born in him to fight, not so much against his fellow men as against the overwhelming odds of adventure as they came to him. And now he was up against the deadliest game of all. He saw it. He felt it. The thing gripped him. In the eyes of that Law of which he had so recently been a part he was a murderer. And in the province of Alberta the penalty for killing a man was hanging. Because horror and fear did not seize upon him, he wondered if he still realized the situation. He believed that he did. It was merely a matter of human nature. Death, he had supposed, was a fixed and foregone thing. He had believed that only a few hours of life were left for him. And now it was given back to him, for months at least. It was a glorious reprieve, and——

Suddenly his heart stood still in the thrill of the thought that came to him. Marette Radisson had known that he was not going to die! She had hinted the fact, and he, like a blundering idiot, had failed to catch the significance of it. She had given him no

sympathy, had laughed at him, had almost made fun of him, simply because she knew that he was going to live!

He turned suddenly on Father Layonne.

"They shall believe me!" he cried. "I shall make them believe me! *Mon père,* I lied! I lied to save Sandy McTrigger, and I shall tell them why. If Doctor Cardigan has not made another mistake, I want them all here again. Will you arrange it?"

"Inspector Kedsty is waiting outside," said Father Layonne quietly, "but I should not act in haste, Jimmy. I should wait. I should think—think."

"You mean take time to think up a story that will hold water, *mon père?* I have that. I have the story. And yet——" He smiled a bit dismally. "I did make one pretty thorough confession, didn't I, Father?"

"It was very convincing, Jimmy. It went so particularly into the details, and those details, coupled with the facts that you were seen at John Barkley's earlier in the evening, and that it was you who found him dead a number of hours later——"

"All make a strong case against me," agreed Kent. "As a matter of fact, I was up at Barkley's to look over an old map he had made of the Porcupine country twenty years ago. He couldn't find it. Later he sent word he had run across it. I returned and found him dead."

The little missioner nodded, but did not speak.

"It is embarrassing," Kent went on. "It almost

seems as though I ought to go through with it, like a sport. When a man loses, it isn't good taste to set up a howl. It makes him sort of yellow-backed, you know. To play the game according to rules, I suppose I ought to keep quiet and allow myself to be hung without making any disturbance. Die game, and all that, you know. Then there is the other way of looking at it. This poor neck of mine depends on me. It has given me a lot of good service. It has been mighty loyal. It has even swallowed eggs on the day it thought it was going to die. And I'd be a poor specimen of humanity to go back on it now. I want to do that neck a good turn. I want to save it. And I'm going to—if I can!"

In spite of the unpleasant tension of the moment, it cheered Father Layonne to see this old humor returning into the heart of his friend. With him love was an enduring thing. He might grieve for James Kent, he might pray for the salvation of his soul, he might believe him guilty, yet he still bore for him the affection which was too deeply rooted in his heart to be uptorn by physical things or the happenings of chance. So the old cheer of his smile came back, and he said:

"To fight for his life is a privilege which God gives to every man, Jimmy. I was terrified when I came to you. I believed it would have been better if you had died. I can see my error. It will be a terrible fight. If you win, I shall be glad. If you lose, I

know that you will lose bravely. Perhaps you are right. It may be best to see Inspector Kedsty before you have had time to think. That point will have its psychological effect. Shall I tell him you are prepared to see him?"

Kent nodded. "Yes. Now."

Father Layonne went to the door. Even there he seemed to hesitate an instant, as if again to call upon Kent to reconsider. Then he opened it and went out.

Kent waited impatiently. His hand, fumbling at his bedclothes, seized upon the cloth with which he had wiped his lips, and it suddenly occurred to him that it had been a long time since it had shown a fresh stain of blood. Now that he knew it was not a deadly thing, the tightening in his chest was less uncomfortable. He felt like getting up and meeting his visitors on his feet. Every nerve in his body wanted action, and the minutes of silence which followed the closing of the door after the missioner were drawn out and tedious to him. A quarter of an hour passed before he heard returning footsteps, and by the sound of them he knew Kedsty was not coming alone. Probably *le père* would return with him. And possibly Cardigan.

What happened in the next few seconds was somewhat of a shock to him. Father Layonne entered first, and then came Inspector Kedsty. Kent's eyes shot to the face of the commander of N Division. There was scarcely recognition in it. A mere inclination of the

head, not enough to call a greeting, was the reply to Kent's nod and salute. Never had he seen Kedsty's face more like the face of an emotionless sphinx. But what disturbed him most was the presence of people he had not expected. Close behind Kedsty was McDougal, the magistrate, and behind McDougal entered Constables Pelly and Brant, stiffly erect and clearly under orders. Cardigan, pale and uneasy, came in last, with the stenographer. Scarcely had they entered the room when Constable Pelly pronounced the formal warning of the Criminal Code of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, and Kent was legally under arrest.

He had not looked for this. He knew, of course, that the process of the Law would take its course, but he had not anticipated this bloodthirsty suddenness. He had expected, first of all, to talk with Kedsty as man to man. And yet—it was the Law. He realized this as his eyes traveled from Kedsty's rock-like face to the expressionless immobility of his old friends, Constables Pelly and Brant. If there was sympathy, it was hidden except in the faces of Cardigan and Father Layonne. And Kent, exultantly hopeful a little while before, felt his heart grow heavy within him as he waited for the moment when he would begin the fight to repossess himself of the life and freed which he had lost.

CHAPTER VIII

FOR some time after the door to Kent's room had closed upon the ominous visitation of the Law, young Mercer remained standing in the hall, debating with himself whether his own moment had not arrived. In the end he decided that it had, and with Kent's fifty dollars in his pocket he made for the shack of the old Indian trailer, Mooie. It was an hour later when he returned, just in time to see Kent's door open again. Doctor Cardigan and Father Layonne reappeared first, followed in turn by the blonde stenographer, the magistrate, and Constables Pelly and Brant. Then the door closed.

Within the room, sweating from the ordeal through which he had passed, Kent sat bolstered against his pillows, facing Inspector Kedsty with blazing eyes.

"I've asked for these few moments alone with you, Kedsty, because I wanted to talk to you as a man and not as my superior officer. I am, I take it, no longer a member of the force. That being the case, I owe you no more respect than I owe to any other man. And I am pleased to have the very great privilege of calling you a cursed scoundrel!"

Kedsty's face was hot, but as his hands clenched

slowly, it turned redder. Before he could speak, Kent went on.

"You have not shown me the courtesy or the sympathy you have had for the worst criminals that ever faced you. You amazed every man that was in this room, because at one time—if not now—they were my friends. It wasn't what you said. It was how you said it. Whenever there was an inclination on their part to believe, you killed it—not honestly and squarely, by giving me a chance. Whenever you saw a chance for me to win a point, you fell back upon the law. And you don't believe that I killed John Barkley. I know it. You called me a liar the day I made that fool confession. You still believe that I lied. And I have waited until we were alone to ask you certain things, for I still have something of courtesy left in me, if you haven't. What is your game? What has brought about the change in you? Is it——"

His right hand clenched hard as a rock as he leaned toward Kedsty.

"Is it because of the girl hiding up at your bungalow, Kedsty?"

Even in that moment, when he had the desire to strike the man before him, it was impossible for him not to admire the stone-like invulnerability of Kedsty. He had never heard of another man calling Kedsty a scoundrel or dishonest. And yet, except that his faced burned more dully red, the Inspector was as impassively calm as ever. Even Kent's intimation

that he was playing a game, and his direct accusation that he was keeping Marette Radisson in hiding at his bungalow, seemed to have no disturbing effect on him. For a space he looked at Kent, as if measuring the poise of the other's mind. When he spoke, it was in a voice so quiet and calm that Kent stared at him in amazement.

"I don't blame you, Kent," he said. "I don't blame you for calling me a scoundrel, or anything else you want to. I think I should do the same if I were in your place. You think it is incredible, because of our previous association, that I should not make every effort to save you. I would, if I thought you were innocent. But I don't. I believe you are guilty. I cannot see where there is a loophole in the evidence against you, as given in your own confession. Why, man, even if I could help to prove you innocent of killing John Barkley——"

He paused and twisted one of his gray mustaches, half facing the window for a moment. "Even if I did that," he went on, "you would still have twenty years of prison ahead of you for the worst kind of perjury on the face of the earth, perjury committed at a time when you thought you were dying! You are guilty, Kent. If not of one thing, then of the other. I am not playing a game. And as for the girl—there is no girl at my bungalow."

He turned to the door; and Kent made no effort to stop him. Words came to his lips and died there, and

for a space after Kedsty had gone he stared out into the green forest world beyond his window, seeing nothing. Inspector Kedsty, quietly and calmly, had spoken words that sent his hopes crashing in ruin about him. For even if he escaped the hangman, he was still a criminal—a criminal of the worst sort, perhaps, next to the man who kills another. If he proved that he had not killed John Barkley, he would convict himself, at the same time, of having made solemn oath to a lie on what he supposed was his death-bed. And for that, a possible twenty years in the Edmonton penitentiary! At best he could not expect less than ten. Ten years—twenty years—in prison! That, or hang.

The sweat broke out on his face. He did not curse Kedsty now. His anger was gone. Kedsty had seen all the time what he, like a fool, had not thought of. No matter how the Inspector might feel in that deeply buried heart of his, he could not do otherwise than he was doing. He, James Kent, who hated a lie above all the things on the earth, was *kin-as-kisew*—the blackest liar of all, a man who lied when he was dying.

And for that lie there was a great punishment. The Law saw with its own eyes. It was a single-track affair, narrow-visioned, caring nothing for what was to the right or the left. It would tolerate no excuse which he might find for himself. He had lied to save a human life, but that life the Law itself had wanted. So he had both robbed and outraged the Law, even

though a miracle saved him the greatest penalty of all.

The weight of the thing crushed him. It was as if for the first time a window had opened for him, and he saw what Kedsty had seen. And then, as the minutes passed, the fighting spirit in him rose again. He was not of the sort to go under easily. Personal danger had always stirred him to his greatest depths, and he had never confronted a danger greater than this he was facing now. It was not a matter of leaping quickly and on the spur of the moment. For ten years his training had been that of a hunter of men, and the psychology of the man hunt had been his strong point. Always, in seeking his quarry, he had tried first to bring himself into a mental sympathy and understanding with that quarry. To analyze what an outlaw would do under certain conditions and with certain environments and racial inheritances behind him was to Kent the premier move in the thrilling game. He had evolved rules of great importance for himself, but always he had worked them out from the vantage point of the huntsman. Now he began to turn them around. He, James Kent, was no longer the hunter, but the hunted, and all the tricks which he had mastered must now be worked the other way. His woodcraft, his cunning, the fine points he had learned of the game of one-against-one would avail him but little when it came to the witness chair and a trial.

The open window was his first inspiration. Ad-

venture had been the blood of his life. And out there, behind the green forests rolling away like the billows of an ocean, lay the greatest adventure of all. Once in those beloved forests covering almost the half of a continent, he would be willing to die if the world beat him. He could see himself playing the game of the hunted as no other man had ever played it before. Let him once have his guns and his freedom, with all that world waiting for him——

Eagerness gleamed in his eyes, and then, slowly, it died out. The open window, after all, was but a mockery. He rolled sideways from his bed and partly balanced himself on his feet. The effort made him dizzy. He doubted if he could have walked a hundred yards after climbing through the window. Instantly another thought leaped into his brain. His head was clearing. He swayed across the room and back again, the first time he had been on his feet since the half-breed's bullet had laid him out. He would fool Cardigan. He would fool Kedsty. As he recovered his strength, he would keep it to himself. He would play sick man to the limit, and then some night he would take advantage of the open window!

The thought thrilled him as no other thing in the world had ever thrilled him before. For the first time he sensed the vast difference between the hunter and the hunted, between the man who played the game of life and death alone and the one who played it with the Law and all its might behind him. To hunt was thrill-

ing. To be hunted was more thrilling. Every nerve in his body tingled. A different kind of fire burned in his brain. He was the creature who was at bay. The other fellow was the hunter now.

He went back to the window and leaned far out. He looked at the forest and saw it with new eyes. The gleam of the slowly moving river held a meaning for him that it had never held before. Doctor Cardigan, seeing him then, would have sworn the fever had returned. His eyes held a slumbering fire. His face was flushed. In these moments Kent did not see death. He was not visioning the iron bars of a prison. His blood pulsed only to the stir of that greatest of all adventures which lay ahead of him. He, the best man-hunter in two thousand miles of wilderness, would beat the hunters themselves. The hound had turned fox, and that fox knew the tricks of both the hunter and the hunted. He would win! A world beckoned to him, and he would reach the heart of that world. Already there began to flash through his mind memory of the places where he could find safety and freedom for all time. No man in all the Northland knew its out-of-the-way corners better than he—its unmapped and unexplored places, the far and mysterious patches of *terra incognita,* where the sun still rose and set without permission of the Law, and God laughed as in the days when prehistoric monsters fed from the tops of trees no taller than themselves. Once through that window, with the strength to travel,

and the Law might seek him for a hundred years without profit to itself.

It was not bravado in his blood that stirred these thoughts. It was not panic or an unsound excitement. He was measuring things even as he visioned them. He would go down-river way, toward the Arctic. And he would find Marette Radisson! Yes, even though she lived at Barracks at Fort Simpson, he would find her! And after that? The question blurred all other questions in his mind. There were many answers to it.

Knowing that it would be fatal to his scheme if he were found on his feet, he returned to his bed. The flush of his exertion and excitement was still in his face when Doctor Cardigan came half an hour later.

Within the next few minutes he put Cardigan more at his ease than he had been during the preceding day and night. It was, after all, an error which made him happier the more he thought about it, he told the surgeon. He admitted that at first the discovery that he was going to live had horrified him. But now the whole thing bore a different aspect for him. As soon as he was sufficiently strong, he would begin gathering the evidences for his alibi, and he was confident of proving himself innocent of John Barkley's murder.

He anticipated ten years in the Edmonton penitentiary. But what were ten years there as compared with forty or fifty under the sod? He wrung Cardigan's hand. He thanked him for the splendid care he had given him. It was he, Cardigan, who had

saved him from the grave, he said—and Cardigan grew younger under his eyes.

"I thought you'd look at it differently, Kent," he said, drawing in a deep breath. "My God, when I found I had made that mistake——"

"You figured you were handing me over to the hangman," smiled Kent. "It's true I shouldn't have made that confession, old man, if I hadn't rated you right next to God Almighty when it came to telling whether a man was going to live or die. But we all make slips. I've made 'em. And you've got no apology to make. I may ask you to send me good cigars now and then while I'm in retirement at Edmonton, and I shall probably insist that you come to smoke with me occasionally and tell me the news of the rivers. But I'm afraid, old chap, that I'm going to worry you a bit more here. I feel queer today, queer inside me. Now it would be a topping joke if some other complication should set in and fool us all again, wouldn't it?"

He could see the impression he was making on Cardigan. Again his faith in the psychology of the mind found its absolute verification. Cardigan, lifted unexpectedly out of the slough of despond by the very man whom he expected to condemn him, became from that moment, in the face of the mental reaction, almost hypersympathetic. When finally he left the room, Kent was inwardly rejoicing. For Cardigan had told him it would be some time before he was strong enough to stand on his feet.

He did not see Mercer all the rest of that day. It was Cardigan who personally brought his dinner and his supper and attended him last at night. He asked not to be interrupted again, as he felt that he wanted to sleep. There was a guard outside his door now.

Cardigan scowled when he volunteered this information. It was sheer nonsense in Kedsty taking such a silly precaution. But he would give the guard rubber-soled shoes and insist that he make no sound that would disturb him. Kent thanked him, and grinned exultantly when he was gone.

He waited until his watch told him it was ten o'clock before he began the exercise which he had prescribed for himself. Noiselessly he rolled out of bed. There was no sensation of dizziness when he stood on his feet this time. His head was as clear as a bell. He began experimenting by inhaling deeper and still deeper breaths and by straightening his chest.

There was no pain, as he had expected there would be. He felt like crying out in his joy. One after the other he stretched up his arms. He bent over until the tips of his fingers touched the floor. He crooked his knees, leaned from side to side, changed from one attitude to another, amazed at the strength and elasticity of his body. Twenty times, before he returned to his bed, he walked back and forth across his room.

He was sleepless. Lying with his back to the pillows he looked out into the starlight, watching for the first glow of the moon and listening again to the owls that

had nested in the lightning-shriven tree. An hour later he resumed his exercise.

He was on his feet when through his window he heard the sound of approaching voices and then of running feet. A moment later some one was pounding at a door, and a loud voice shouted for Doctor Cardigan. Kent drew cautiously nearer the window. The moon had risen, and he saw figures approaching, slowly, as if weighted under a burden. Before they turned out of his vision, he made out two men bearing some heavy object between them. Then came the opening of a door, other voices, and after that an interval of quiet.

He returned to his bed, wondering who the new patient could be.

He was breathing easier after his exertion. The fact that he was feeling keenly alive, and that the thickening in his chest was disappearing, flushed him with elation. An unbounded optimism possessed him. It was late when he fell asleep, and he slept late. It was Mercer's entrance into his room that roused him He came in softly, closed the door softly, yet Kent heard him. The moment he pulled himself up, he knew that Mercer had a report to make, and he also saw that something upsetting had happened to him. Mercer was a bit excited.

"I beg pardon for waking you, sir," he said, leaning close over Kent, as though fearing the guard

might be listening at the door. "But I thought it best for you to hear about the Indian, sir."

"The Indian?"

"Yes, sir—Mooie, sir. I am quite upset over it, Mr. Kent. He told me early last evening that he had found the scow on which the girl was going down-river. He said it was hidden in Kim's Bayou."

"Kim's Bayou! That was a good hiding-place, Mercer!"

"A very good place of concealment indeed, sir. As soon as it was dark, Mooie returned to watch. What happened to him I haven't fully discovered, sir. But it must have been near midnight when he staggered up to Crossen's place, bleeding and half out of his senses. They brought him here, and I watched over him most of the night. He says the girl went aboard the scow and that the scow started down-river. That much I learned, sir. But all the rest he mumbles in a tongue I can not understand. Crossen says it's Cree, and that old Mooie believes devils jumped on him with clubs down at Kim's Bayou. Of course they must have been men. I don't believe in Mooie's devils, sir."

"Nor I," said Kent, the blood stirring strangely in his veins. "Mercer, it simply means there was some one cleverer than old Mooie watching that trail."

With a curiously tense face Mercer was looking cautiously toward the door. Then he leaned still lower over Kent.

"During his mumblings, when I was alone with him, I heard him speak a name, sir. Half a dozen times, sir—and it was—*Kedsty!*"

Kent's fingers gripped the young Englishman's hand.

"You heard *that,* Mercer?"

"I am sure I could not have been mistaken, sir. It was repeated a number of times."

Kent fell back against his pillows. His mind was working swiftly. He knew that behind an effort to appear calm Mercer was uneasy over what had happened.

"We mustn't let this get out, Mercer," he said. "If Mooie should be badly hurt—should die, for instance—and it was discovered that you and I——"

He knew he had gone far enough to give effect to his words. He did not even look at Mercer.

"Watch him closely, old man, and report to me everything that happens. Find out more about Kedsty, if you can. I shall advise you how to act. It is rather ticklish, you know—for you! And"—he smiled at Mercer—"I'm unusually hungry this morning. Add another egg, will you, Mercer? Three instead of two, and a couple of extra slices of toast. And don't let any one know that my appetite is improving. It may be best for both of us—especially if Mooie should happen to die. Understand, old man?"

"I—I think *I* do, sir," replied Mercer, paling at

the grimly smiling thing he saw in Kent's eyes. "I shall do as you say, sir."

When he had gone, Kent knew that he had accurately measured his man. True to a certain type, Mercer would do a great deal for fifty dollars—under cover. In the open he was a coward. And Kent knew the value of such a man under certain conditions. The present was one of those conditions. From this hour Mercer would be a priceless asset to his scheme for personal salvation.

CHAPTER IX

THAT morning Kent ate a breakfast that would have amazed Doctor Cardigan and would have roused a greater caution in Inspector Kedsty had he known of it. While eating he strengthened the bonds already welded between himself and Mercer. He feigned great uneasiness over the condition of Mooie, who he knew was not fatally hurt because Mercer had told him there was no fracture. But if he should happen to die, he told Mercer, it would mean something pretty bad for them, if their part in the affair leaked out.

As for himself, it would make little difference, as he was "in bad" anyway. But he did not want to see a good friend get into trouble on his account. Mercer was impressed. He saw himself an instrument in a possible murder affair, and the thought terrified him. Even at best, Kent told him, they had given and taken bribes, a fact that would go hard with them unless Mooie kept his mouth shut. And if the Indian knew anything out of the way about Kedsty, it was mighty important that he, Mercer, get hold of it, for it might prove a trump card with them in the event of a showdown with the Inspector of Police. As a matter of form, Mercer took his temperature. It was perfectly

normal, but it was easy for Kent to persuade a notation on the chart a degree above.

"Better keep them thinking I'm still pretty sick," he assured Mercer. "They won't suspect there is anything between us then."

Mercer was so much in sympathy with the idea that he suggested adding another half-degree.

It was a splendid day for Kent. He could feel himself growing stronger with each hour that passed. Yet not once during the day did he get out of his bed, fearing that he might be discovered. Cardigan visited him twice and had no suspicion of Mercer's temperature chart. He dressed his wound, which was healing fast. It was the fever which depressed him. There must be, he said, some internal disarrangement which would soon clear itself up. Otherwise there seemed to be no very great reason why Kent should not get on his feet. He smiled apologetically.

"Seems queer to say that, when a little while ago I was telling you it was time to die," he said.

That night, after ten o'clock, Kent went through his setting-up exercises four times. He marveled even more than the preceding night at the swiftness with which his strength was returning. Half a dozen times the little devils of eagerness working in his blood prompted him to take to the window at once.

For three days and nights thereafter he kept his secret and added to his strength. Doctor Cardigan came in to see him at intervals, and Father Layonne

visited him regularly every afternoon. Mercer was his most frequent visitor. On the third day two things happened to create a little excitement. Doctor Cardigan left on a four-day journey to a settlement fifty miles south, leaving Mercer in charge—and Mooie came suddenly out of his fever into his normal senses again. The first event filled Kent with joy. With Cardigan out of the way there would be no immediate danger of the discovery that he was no longer a sick man. But it was the recovery of Mooie from the thumping he had received about the head that delighted Mercer. He was exultant. With the quick reaction of his kind he gloated over the fact before Kent. He let it be known that he was no longer afraid, and from the moment Mooie was out of danger his attitude was such that more than once Kent would have taken keen pleasure in kicking him from the room. Also, from the hour he was safely in charge of Doctor Cardigan's place, Mercer began to swell with importance. Kent saw the new danger and began to humor him. He flattered him. He assured him that it was a burning shame Cardigan had not taken him into partnership. He deserved it. And, in justice to himself, Mercer should demand that partnership when Cardigan returned. He, Kent, would talk to Father Layonne about it, and the missioner would spread the gospel of what ought to be among others who were influential at the Landing. For two days he played with Mercer as an angler plays with a treacherous fish.

He tried to get Mercer to discover more about Mooie's reference to Kedsty. But the old Indian had shut up like a clam.

"He was frightened when I told him he had said things about the Inspector," Mercer reported. "He disavowed everything. He shook his head—no, no, no. He had not seen Kedsty. He knew nothing about him. I can do nothing with him, Kent."

He had dropped his "sirs," also his servant-like servility. He helped to smoke Kent's cigars with the intimacy of proprietorship, and with offensive freedom called him "Kent." He spoke of the Inspector as "Kedsty," and of Father Layonne as "the little preacher." He swelled perceptibly, and Kent knew that each hour of that swelling added to his own danger.

He believed that Mercer was talking. Several times a day he heard him in conversation with the guard, and not infrequently Mercer went down to the Landing, twirling a little reed cane that he had not dared to use before. He began to drop opinions and information to Kent in a superior sort of way. On the fourth day word came that Doctor Cardigan would not return for another forty-eight hours, and with unblushing conceit Mercer intimated that when he did return he would find big changes. Then it was that in the stupidity of his egotism he said:

"Kedsty has taken a great fancy to me, Kent. He's a square old top, when you take him right. Had me over this afternoon, and we smoked a cigar together.

When I told him that I looked in at your window last night and saw you going through a lot of exercises, he jumped up as if some one had stuck a pin in him. 'Why, I thought he was sick—*bad!*' he said. And I let him know there were better ways of making a sick man well than Cardigan's. 'Give them plenty to eat,' I said. 'Let 'em live normal,' I argued. 'Look at Kent, for instance,' I told him. 'He's been eating like a bear for a week, and he can turn somersaults this minute!' That topped him over, Kent. I knew it would be a bit of a surprise for him, that I should do what Cardigan couldn't do. He walked back and forth, black as a hat—thinking of Cardigan, I suppose. Then he called in that Pelly chap and gave him something which he wrote on a piece of paper. After that he shook hands with me, slapped me on the shoulder most intimately, and gave me another cigar. He's a keen old blade, Kent. He doesn't need more than one pair of eyes to see what I've done since Cardigan went away!"

If ever Kent's hands had itched to get at the throat of a human being, the yearning convulsed his fingers now. At the moment when he was about to act Mercer had betrayed him to Kedsty! He turned his face away so that Mercer could not see what was in his eyes. Under his body he concealed his clenched hands. Within himself he fought against the insane desire that was raging in his blood, the desire to leap on Mercer and kill him. If Cardigan had reported h

condition to Kedsty, it would have been different. He would have accepted the report as a matter of honorable necessity on Cardigan's part. But Mercer —a toad blown up by his own wind, a consummate fiend who would sell his best friend, a fool, an ass——

For a space he held himself rigid as a stone, his face turned away from Mercer. His better sense won. He knew that his last chance depended upon his coolness now. And Mercer unwittingly helped him to win by slyly pocketing a couple of his cigars and leaving the room. For a minute or two Kent heard him talking to the guard outside the door.

He sat up then. It was five o'clock. How long ago was it that Mercer had seen Kedsty? What was the order that the Inspector had written on a sheet of paper for Constable Pelly? Was it simply that he should be more closely watched, or was it a command to move him to one of the cells close to the detachment office? If it was the latter, all his hopes and plans were destroyed. His mind flew to those cells.

The Landing had no jail, not even a guard-house, though the members of the force sometimes spoke of the cells just behind Inspector Kedsty's office by that name. The cells were of cement, and Kent himself had helped to plan them! The irony of the thing did not strike him just then. He was recalling the fact that no prisoner had ever escaped from those cement cells. If no action were taken before six o'clock, he was sure that it would be postponed until the follow-

ng morning. It was possible that Kedsty's order was for Pelly to prepare a cell for him. Deep in his soul he prayed fervently that it was only a matter of preparation. If they would give him one more night—just one!

His watch tinkled the half-hour. Then a quarter of six. Then six. His blood ran feverishly, in spite of the fact that he possessed the reputation of being the coolest man in N Division. He lighted his last cigar and smoked it slowly to cover the suspense which he feared revealed itself in his face, should any one come into his room. His supper was due at seven. At eight it would begin to get dusk. The moon was rising later each night, and it would not appear over the forests until after eleven. He would go through his window at ten o'clock. His mind worked swiftly and surely as to the method of his first night's flight. There were always a number of boats down at Crossen's place. He would start in one of these, and by the time Mercer discovered he was gone, he would be forty miles on his way to freedom. Then he would set his boat adrift, or hide it, and start cross-country until his trail was lost. Somewhere and in some way he would find both guns and food. It was fortunate that he had not given Mercer the other fifty dollars under his pillow.

At seven Mercer came with his supper. A little gleam of disappointment shot into his pale eyes when

he found the last cigar gone from the box. Kent saw the expression and tried to grin good-humoredly.

"I'm going to have Father Layonne bring me up another box in the morning, Mercer," he said. "That is, if I can get hold of him."

"You probably can," snapped Mercer. "He doesn't live far from barracks, and that's where you are going. I've got orders to have you ready to move in the morning."

Kent's blood seemed for an instant to flash into living flame. He drank a part of his cup of coffee and said then, with a shrug of his shoulders: "I'm glad of it, Mercer. I'm anxious to have the thing over. The sooner they get me down there, the quicker they will take action. And I'm not afraid, not a bit of it. I'm bound to win. There isn't a chance in a hundred that they can convict me."

Then he added: "And I'm going to have a box of cigars sent up to you, Mercer. I'm grateful to you for the splendid treatment you have given me."

No sooner had Mercer gone with the supper things than Kent's knotted fist shook itself fiercely in the direction of the door.

"My God, how I'd like to have you out in the woods—alone—for just one hour!" he whispered.

Eight o'clock came, and nine. Two or three times he heard voices in the hall, probably Mercer talking with the guard. Once he thought he heard a rumble of thunder, and his heart throbbed joyously. Never

had he welcomed a storm as he would have welcomed it tonight. But the skies remained clear. Not only that, but the stars as they began to appear seemed to him more brilliant than he had ever seen them before. And it was very still. The rattle of a scow-chain came up to him from the river as though it were only a hundred yards away. He knew that it was one of Mooie's dogs he heard howling over near the sawmill. The owls, flitting past his window, seemed to click their beaks more loudly than last night. A dozen times he fancied he could hear the rippling voice of the river that very soon was to carry him on toward freedom.

The river! Every dream and aspiration found its voice for him in that river now. Down it Marette Radisson had gone. And somewhere along it, or on the river beyond, or the third river still beyond that, he would find her. In the long, tense wait between the hours of nine and ten he brought the girl back into his room again. He recalled every gesture she had made, every word she had spoken. He felt the thrill of her hand on his forehead, her kiss, and in his brain her softly spoken words repeated themselves over and over again, "I think that if you lived very long I should love you." And as she had spoken those words *she knew that he was not going to die!*

Why, then, had she gone away? Knowing that he was going to live, why had she not remained to help

him if she could? Either she had spoken the words in jest, or——

A new thought flashed into his mind. It almost drew a cry from his lips. It brought him up tense, erect, his heart pounding. Had she gone away? Was it not possible that she, too, was playing a game in giving the impression that she was leaving down-river on the hidden scow? Was it conceivable that she was playing that game against Kedsty? A picture, clean-cut as the stars in the sky, began to outline itself in his mental vision. It was clear, now, what Mooie's mumblings about Kedsty had signified. Kedsty had accompanied Marette to the scow. Mooie had seen him and had given the fact away in his fever. Afterward he had clamped his mouth shut through fear of the "big man" of the Law. But why, still later, had he almost been done to death? Mooie was a harmless creature. He had no enemies.

There was no one at the Landing who would have assaulted the old trailer, whose hair was white with age. No one, unless it was Kedsty himself—Kedsty at bay, Kedsty in a rage. Even that was inconceivable. Whatever the motive of the assault might be, and no matter who had committed it, Mooie had most certainly seen the Inspector of Police accompany Marette Radisson to the scow. And the question which Kent found it impossible to answer was, had Marette Radisson really gone down the river on that scow?

It was almost with a feeling of disappointment that he told himself it was possible she had not. He wanted her on the river. He wanted her going north and still farther north. The thought that she was mixed up in some affair that had to do with Kedsty was displeasing to him. If she was still in the Landing or near the Landing, it could no longer be on account of Sandy McTrigger, the man his confession had saved. In his heart he prayed that she was many days down the Athabasca, for it was there—and only there—that he would ever see her again. And his greatest desire, next to his desire for his freedom, was to find her. He was frank with himself in making that confession. He was more than that. He knew that not a day or night would pass that he would not think or dream of Marette Radisson. The wonder of her had grown more vivid for him with each hour that passed, and he was sorry now that he had not dared to touch her hair. She would not have been offended with him, for she had kissed him —after he had killed the impulse to lay his hand on that soft glory that had crowned her head.

And then the little bell in his watch tinkled the hour of ten! He sat up with a jerk. For a space he held his breath while he listened. In the hall outside his room there was no sound. An inch at a time he drew himself off his bed until he stood on his feet. His clothes hung on hooks in the wall, and he groped his way to them so quietly that one listen-

ing at the crack of his door would not have heard him. He dressed swiftly. Then he made his way to the window, looked out, and listened.

In the brilliant starlight he saw nothing but the two white stubs of the lightning-shattered trees in which the owls lived. And it was very still. The air was fresh and sweet in his face. In it he caught the scent of the distant balsams and cedars. The world, wonderful in its night silence, waited for him. It was impossible for him to conceive of failure or death out there, and it seemed unreal and trivial that the Law should expect to hold him, with that world reaching out its arms to him and calling him.

Assured that the moment for action was at hand, he moved quickly. In another ten seconds he was through the window, and his feet were on the ground. For a space he stood out clear in the starlight. Then he hurried to the end of the building and hid himself in the shadow. The swiftness of his movement had brought him no physical discomfort, and his blood danced with the thrill of the earth under his feet and the thought that his wound must be even more completely healed than he had supposed. A wild exultation swept over him. He was free! He could see the river now, shimmering and talking to him in the starlight, urging him to hurry, telling him that only a little while ago another had gone north on the breast of it, and that if he hastened it would help him to overtake her. He felt the throb of new life in

his body. His eyes shone strangely in the semi-gloom.

It seemed to him that only yesterday Marette had gone. She could not be far away, even now. And in these moments, with the breath of freedom stirring him with the glory of new life, she was different for him from what she had ever been. She was a part of him. He could not think of escape without thinking of her. She became, in these precious moments, the living soul of his wilderness. He felt her presence. The thought possessed him that somewhere down the river she was thinking of him, waiting, expecting him. And in that same flash he made up his mind that he would not discard the boat, as he had planned; he would conceal himself by day, and float downstream by night, until at last he came to Marette Radisson. And then he would tell her why he had come. And after that——

He looked toward Crossen's place. He would make straight for it, openly, like a man bent on a mission there was no reason to conceal. If luck went right, and Crossen was abed, he would be on the river within fifteen minutes. His blood ran faster as he took his first step out into the open starlight. Fifty yards ahead of him was the building which Cardigan used for his fuel. Safely beyond that, no one could see him from the windows of the hospital. He walked swiftly. Twenty paces, thirty, forty—and he stopped as suddenly as the half-breed's bullet had stopped him weeks before. Round the end of Cardigan's fuel

house came a figure. It was Mercer. He was twirling his little cane and traveling quietly as a cat. They were not ten feet apart, yet Kent had not heard him.

Mercer stopped. The cane dropped from his hand. Even in the starlight Kent could see his face turn white.

"Don't make a sound, Mercer," he warned. "I'm taking a little exercise in the open air. If you cry out, I'll kill you!"

He advanced slowly, speaking in a voice that could not have been heard at the windows behind him. And then a thing happened that froze the blood in his veins. He had heard the scream of every beast of the great forests, but never a scream like that which came from Mercer's lips now. It was not the cry of a man. To Kent it was the voice of a fiend, a devil. It did not call for help. It was wordless. And as the horrible sound issued from Mercer's mouth he could see the swelling throat and bulging eyes that accompanied the effort. They made him think of a snake, a cobra.

The chill went out of his blood, replaced by a flame of hottest fire. He forgot everything but that this serpent was in his path. Twice he had stood in his way. And he hated him. He hated him with a virulency that was death. Neither the call of freedom nor the threat of prison could keep him from wreaking vengeance now. Without a sound he was at Mercer's throat, and the scream ended in a choking

shriek. His fingers dug into flabby flesh, and his clenched fist beat again and again into Mercer's face.

He went to the ground, crushing the human serpent under him. And he continued to strike and choke as he had never struck or choked another man, all other things overwhelmed by his mad desire to tear into pieces this two-legged English vermin who was too foul to exist on the face of the earth.

And he still continued to strike—even after the path lay clear once more between him and the river.

CHAPTER X

WHAT a terrible and inexcusable madness had possessed him, Kent realized the instant he rose from Mercer's prostrate body. Never had his brain flamed to that madness before. He believed at first that he had killed Mercer. It was neither pity nor regret that brought him to his senses. Mercer, a coward and a traitor, a sneak of the lowest type, had no excuse for living. It was the thought that he had lost his chance to reach the river that cleared his head as he swayed over Mercer.

He heard running feet. He saw figures approaching swiftly through the starlight. And he was too weak to fight or run. The little strength he had saved up, and which he had planned to use so carefully in his flight, was gone. His wound, weeks in bed, muscles unaccustomed to the terrific exertion he had made in these moments of his vengeance, left him now panting and swaying as the running footsteps came nearer.

His head swam. For a space he was sickeningly dizzy, and in the first moment of that dizziness, when every drop of blood in his body seemed rushing to his brain, his vision was twisted and his sense of direction gone. In his rage he had overexerted himself. He knew that something had gone wrong inside him and

that he was helpless. Even then his impulse was to stagger toward the inanimate Mercer and kick him, but hands caught him and held him. He heard an amazed voice, then another—and something hard and cold shut round his wrists like a pair of toothless jaws.

It was Constable Carter, Inspector Kedsty's right-hand man about barracks, that he saw first; then old Sands, the caretaker at Cardigan's place. Swiftly as he had turned sick, his brain grew clear, and his blood distributed itself evenly again through his body. He held up his hands. Carter had slipped a pair of irons on him, and the starlight glinted on the shining steel. Sands was bending over Mercer, and Carter was saying in a low voice:

"It's too bad, Kent. But I've got to do it. I saw you from the window just as Mercer screamed. Why did you stop for *him?*"

Mercer was getting up with the assistance of Sands. He turned a bloated and unseeing face toward Kent and Carter. He was blubbering and moaning, as though entreating for mercy in the fear that Kent had not finished with him. Carter pulled Kent away.

"There's only one thing for me to do now," he said. "It isn't pleasant. But the law says I must take you to barracks."

In the sky Kent saw the stars clearly again, and his lungs were drinking in the cool air as in the wonderful moments before his encounter with Mercer.

He had lost. And it was Mercer who had made

him lose. Carter felt the sudden tightening of his muscles as he walked with a hand on his arm. And Kent shut his teeth close and made no answer to what Carter had said, except that Carter heard something which he thought was a sob choked to death in the other's throat.

Carter, too, was a man bred of the red blood of the North, and he knew what was in Kent's heart. For only by the breadth of a hair had Kent failed in his flight.

Pelly was on duty at barracks, and it was Pelly who locked him in one of the three cells behind the detachment office. When he was gone, Kent sat down on the edge of his prison cot and for the first time let the agony of his despair escape in a gasping breath from between his lips. Half an hour ago the world had reached out its arms to him, and he had gone forth to its welcome, only to have the grimmest tragedy of all his life descend upon him like the sword of Damocles. For this was real tragedy. Here there was no hope. The tentacles of the law had him in their grip, and he could no longer dream of escape.

Ghastly was the thought that it was he, James Kent, who had supervised the building of these cells! Acquainted with every trick and stratagem of the prisoner plotting for his freedom, he had left no weak point in their structure. Again he clenched his hands, and in his soul he cursed Mercer as he went to the little barred window that overlooked the river from

his cell. The river was near now. He could hear the murmur of it. He could see its movement, and that movement, played upon by the stars, seemed now a writhing sort of almost noiseless laughter taunting him in his folly.

He went back to his cot, and in his despair buried his face in his hands. In the half-hour after that he did not raise his head. For the first time in his life he knew that he was beaten, so utterly beaten that he no more had the desire to fight, and his soul was dark with the chaos of the things he had lost.

At last he opened his eyes to the blackness of his prison room, and he beheld a marvelous thing. Across the gloom of the cell lay a shaft of golden fire. It was the light of the rising moon coming through his little, steel-barred window. To Kent it had crept into his cell like a living thing. He watched it, fascinated. His eyes followed it to the foot-square aperture, and there, red and glorious as it rose over the forests, the moon itself filled the world. For a space he saw nothing but that moon crowding the frame of his window. And as he rose to his feet and stood where his face was flooded in the light of it, he felt stirring within him the ghosts of his old hopes. One by one they rose up and came to life. He held out his hands, as if to fill them with the liquid glow; his heart beat faster in that glory of the moonrise. The taunting murmur of the river changed once more into hopeful song, his fingers closed tightly around the

bars, and the fighting spirit rose in him again. As that spirit surged stronger, beating down his despair, driving the chaos out of his brain, he watched the moon as it climbed higher, changing from the red of the lower atmosphere to the yellow gold of the greater heights, marveling at the miracle of light and color that had never failed to stir him.

And then he laughed. If Pelly or Carter had heard him, they would have wondered if he was mad. It was madness of a sort—the madness of restored confidence, of an unlimited faith, of an optimism that was bound to make dreams come true. Again he looked beyond the bars of his cell. The world was still there; the river was there; all the things that were worth fighting for were there. And he would fight. Just how, he did not try to tell himself now. And then he laughed again, softly, a bit grimly, for he saw the melancholy humor of the fact that he had built his own prison.

He sat down again on the edge of his cot, and the whimsical thought struck him that all those he had brought to this same cell, and who had paid the first of their penance here, must be laughing at him now in the spirit way. In his mental fancy a little army of faces trooped before him, faces dark and white, faces filled with hatred and despair, faces brave with the cheer of hope and faces pallid with the dread of death. And of these ghosts of his man-hunting prowess it was Anton Fournet's face that came out

of the crowd and remained with him. For he had brought Anton to this same cell—Anton, the big Frenchman, with his black hair, his black beard, and his great, rolling laugh that even in the days when he was waiting for death had rattled the paper-weights on Kedsty's desk.

Anton rose up like a god before Kent now. He had killed a man, and like a brave man he had not denied it. With a heart in his great body as gentle as a girl's, Anton had taken pride in the killing. In his prison days he sang songs to glorify it. He had killed the white man from Chippewyan who had stolen his neighbor's wife! Not *his* wife, but his neighbor's! For Anton's creed was, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you," and he had loved his neighbor with the great forest love of man for man. His neighbor was weak, and Anton was strong with the strength of a bull, so that when the hour came, it was Anton who had measured out vengeance. When Kent brought Anton in, the giant had laughed first at the littleness of his cell, then at the unsuspected strength of it, and after that he had laughed and sung great, roaring songs every day of the brief tenure of life that was given him. When he died, it was with the smiling glory in his face of one who had cheaply righted a great wrong.

Kent would never forget Anton Fournet. He had never ceased to grieve that it had been his misfortune to bring Anton in, and always, in close moments, the

thought of Anton, the stout-hearted, rallied him back to courage. Never would he be the man that Anton Fournet had been, he told himself many times. Never would his heart be as great or as big, though the Law had hanged Anton by the neck until the soul was choked out of his splendid body, for it was history that Anton Fournet had never harmed man, woman, or child until he set out to kill a human snake and the Law placed its heel upon him and crushed him.

And tonight Anton Fournet came into the cell again and sat with Kent on the cot where he had slept many nights, and the ghosts of his laughter and his song filled Kent's ears, and his great courage poured itself out in the moonlit prison room so that at last, when Kent stretched himself on the cot to sleep, it was with the knowledge that the soul of the splendid dead had given him a strength which it was impossible to have gained from the living. For Anton Fournet had died smiling, laughing, singing—and it was of Anton Fournet that he dreamed when he fell asleep. And in that dream came also the vision of a man called Dirty Fingers—and with it inspiration.

CHAPTER XI

WHERE a bit of the big river curved inward like the tongue of a friendly dog, lapping the shore at Athabasca Landing, there still remained Fingers' Row —nine dilapidated, weather-worn, and crazily-built shacks put there by the eccentric genius who had foreseen a boom ten years ahead of its time. And the fifth of these nine, counting from either one end or the other, was named by its owner, Dirty Fingers himself, the Good Old Queen Bess. It was a shack covered with black tar paper, with two windows, like square eyes, fronting the river as if always on the watch for something. Across the front of this shack Dirty Fingers had built a porch to protect himself from the rain in springtime, from the sun in Summer time, and from the snow in the months of Winter. For it was here that Dirty Fingers sat out all of that part of his life which was not spent in bed.

Up and down two thousand miles of the Three Rivers was Dirty Fingers known, and there were superstitious ones who believed that little gods and devils came to sit and commune with him in the front of the tar-papered shack. No one was so wise along those rivers, no one was so satisfied with himself, that he would not have given much to possess the

many things that were hidden away in Dirty Fingers' brain. One would not have suspected the workings of that brain by a look at Dirty Fingers on the porch of his Good Old Queen Bess. He was a great soft lump of a man, a giant of flabbiness. Sitting in his smooth-worn, wooden armchair, he was almost formless. His head was huge, his hair uncut and scraggy, his face smooth as a baby's, fat as a cherub's, and as expressionless as an apple. His folded arms always rested on a huge stomach, whose conspicuousness was increased by an enormous watch-chain made from beaten nuggets of Klondike gold, and Dirty Fingers' thumb and forefinger were always twiddling at this chain. How he had come by the name of Dirty Fingers, when his right name was Alexander Toppet Fingers, no one could definitely say, unless it was that he always bore an unkempt and unwashed appearance.

Whatever the quality of the two hundred and forty-odd pounds of flesh in Dirty Fingers' body, it was the quality of his brain that made people hold him in a sort of awe. For Dirty Fingers was a lawyer, a wilderness lawyer, a forest bencher, a legal strategist of the trail, of the river, of the great timber-lands.

Stored away in his brain was every rule of equity and common law of the great North country. For his knowledge he went back two hundred years. He knew that a law did not die of age, that it must be legislated to death, and out of the moldering past he

had dug up every trick and trap of his trade. He had no law-books. His library was in his head, and his facts were marshaled in pile after pile of closely-written, dust-covered papers in his shack. He did not go to court as other lawyers; and there were barristers in Edmonton who blessed him for that.

His shack was his tabernacle of justice. There he sat, hands folded, and gave out his decisions, his advice, his sentences. He sat until other men would have gone mad. From morning until night, moving only for his meals or to get out of heat or storm, he was a fixture on the porch of the Good Old Queen Bess. For hours he would stare at the river, his pale eyes never seeming to blink. For hours he would remain without a move or a word. One constant companion he had, a dog, fat, emotionless, lazy, like his master. Always this dog was sleeping at his feet or dragging himself wearily at his heels when Dirty Fingers elected to make a journey to the little store where he bartered for food and necessities.

It was Father Layonne who came first to see Kent in his cell the morning after Kent's unsuccessful attempt at flight. An hour later it was Father Layonne who traveled the beaten path to the door of Dirty Fingers' shack. If a visible emotion of pleasure ever entered into Dirty Fingers' face, it was when the little missioner came occasionally to see him. It was then that his tongue let itself loose, and until late at night they talked of many things of which other men

knew but little. This morning Father Layonne did not come casually, but determinedly on business, and when Dirty Fingers learned what that business was, he shook his head disconsolately, folded his fat arms more tightly over his stomach, and stated the sheer impossibility of his going to see Kent. It was not his custom. People must come to him. And he did not like to walk. It was fully a third of a mile from his shack to barracks, possibly half a mile. And it was mostly upgrade! If Kent could be brought to him——

In his cell Kent waited. It was not difficult for him to hear voices in Kedsty's office when the door was open, and he knew that the Inspector did not come in until after the missioner had gone on his mission to Dirty Fingers. Usually he was at the barracks an hour or so earlier. Kent made no effort to figure out a reason for Kedsty's lateness, but he did observe that after his arrival there was more than the usual movement between the office door and the outside of the barracks. Once he was positive that he heard Cardigan's voice, and then he was equally sure that he heard Mercer's. He grinned at that. He must be wrong, for Mercer would be in no condition to talk for several days. He was glad that a turn in the hall hid the door of the detachment office from him, and that the three cells were in an alcove, safely out of sight of the curious eyes of visitors. He was also glad that he had no other prisoner for company.

His situation was one in which he wanted to be alone. To the plan that was forming itself in his mind, solitude was as vital as the coöperation of Alexander Toppet Fingers.

Just how far he could win that coöperation was the problem which confronted him now, and he waited anxiously for the return of Father Layonne, listening for the sound of his footsteps in the outer hall. If, after all, that inspirational thought of last night came to nothing, if Fingers should fail him——

He shrugged his shoulders. If that happened, he could see no other chance. He would have to go on and take his medicine at the hands of a jury. But if Fingers played up to the game——

He looked out on the river again, and again it was the river that seemed to answer him. If Fingers played with him, they would beat Kedsty and the whole of N Division! And in winning he would prove out the greatest psychological experiment he had ever dared to make. The magnitude of the thing, when he stopped to think of it, was a little appalling, but his faith was equally large. He did not consider his philosophy at all supernatural. He had brought it down to the level of the average man and woman.

He believed that every man and woman possessed a subliminal consciousness which it was possible to rouse to tremendous heights if the right psychological key was found to fit its particular lock, and he believed he possessed the key which fitted the deeply-

buried and long-hidden thing in Dirty Fingers' remarkable brain. Because he believed in this metaphysics which he had not read out of Aristotle, he had faith that Fingers would prove his salvation. He felt growing in him stronger than ever a strange kind of elation. He felt better physically than last night. The few minutes of strenuous action in which he had half killed Mercer had been a pretty good test, he told himself. It had left no bad effect, and he need no longer fear the reopening of his wound.

A dozen times he had heard a far door open and close. Now he heard it again, and a few moments later it was followed by a sound which drew a low cry of satisfaction from him. Dirty Fingers, because of overweight and lack of exercise, had what he called an "asthmatic wind," and it was this strenuous working of his lungs that announced his approach to Kent. His dog was also afflicted and for the same reasons, so that when they traveled together there was some rivalry between them.

"We're both bad put out for wind, thank God," Dirty Fingers would say sometimes. "It's a good thing, for if we had more of it, we'd walk farther, and we don't like walking."

The dog was with Fingers now, also Father Layonne, and Pelly. Pelly unlocked the cell, then relocked it again after Fingers and the dog entered. With a nod and a hopeful look the missioner returned with Pelly to the detachment office. Fingers wiped

his red face with a big handkerchief, gasping deeply for breath. Togs, his dog, was panting as if he had just finished the race of his life.

"A difficult climb," wheezed Fingers. "A most difficult climb."

He sat down, rolling out like a great bag of jelly in the one chair in the cell, and began to fan himself with his hat. Kent had already taken stock of the situation. In Fingers' florid countenance and in his almost colorless eyes he detected a bit of excitement which Fingers was trying to hide. Kent knew what it meant. Father Layonne had found it necessary to play his full hand to lure Fingers up the hill, and had given him a hint of what it was that Kent had in store for him. Already the psychological key had begun to work.

Kent sat down on the edge of his cot and grinned sympathetically. "It hasn't always been like this, has it, Fingers?" he said then, leaning a bit forward and speaking with a sudden, low-voiced seriousness. "There was a time, twenty years ago, when you didn't puff after climbing a hill. Twenty years make a big difference, sometimes."

"Yes, sometimes," agreed Fingers in a wheezy whisper.

"Twenty years ago you were—a fighter."

It seemed to Kent that a deeper color came into Dirty Fingers' pale eyes in the few seconds that followed these words.

"A fighter," he repeated. "Most men were fighters in those days of the gold rushes, weren't they, Fingers? I've heard a lot of the old stories about them in my wanderings, and some of them have made me thrill. They weren't afraid to die. And most of them were pretty white when it came to a show-down. You were one of them, Fingers. I heard the story one Winter far north. I've kept it to myself, because I've sort of had the idea that you didn't want people to know or you would have told it yourself. That's why I wanted you to come to see me, Fingers. You know the situation. It's either the noose or iron bars for me. Naturally one would seek for assistance among those who have been his friends. But I do not, with the exception of Father Layonne. Just friendship won't save me, not the sort of friendship we have today. That's why I sent for you. Don't think that I am prying into secrets that are sacred to you, Fingers. God knows I don't mean it that way. But I've got to tell you of a thing that happened a long time ago, before you can understand. You haven't forgotten—you will never forget—Ben Tatman?"

As Kent spoke the name, a name which Dirty Fingers had heard no lips but his own speak aloud in nearly a quarter of a century, a strange and potent force seemed suddenly to take possession of the forest bencher's huge and flabby body. It rippled over and through him like an electrical voltaism, making

his body rigid, stiffening what had seemed to be fat into muscle, tensing his hands until they knotted themselves slowly into fists. The wheeze went out of his breath, and it was the voice of another man who answered Kent.

"You have heard—about—Ben Tatman?"

"Yes. I heard it away up in the Porcupine country. They say it happened twenty years ago or more. This Tatman, so I was told, was a young fellow green from San Francisco—a bank clerk, I think—who came into the gold country and brought his wife with him. They were both chuck-full of courage, and the story was that each worshiped the ground the other walked on, and that the girl had insisted on being her husband's comrade in adventure. Of course neither guessed the sort of thing that was ahead of them.

"Then came that death Winter in Lost City. You know better than I what the laws were in those days, Fingers. Food failed to come up. Snow came early, the thermometer never rose over fifty below zero for three straight months, and Lost City was an inferno of starvation and death. You could go out and kill a man, then, and perhaps get away with it, Fingers. But if you stole so much as a crust of bread or a single bean, you were taken to the edge of the camp and told to go! And that meant certain death—death from hunger and cold, more terrible than shooting or hanging, and for that reason it was the penalty for theft.

"Tatman wasn't a thief. It was seeing his young wife slowly dying of hunger, and his horror at the thought of seeing her fall, as others were falling, a victim to scurvy, that made him steal. He broke into a cabin in the dead of night and stole two cans of beans and a pan of potatoes, more precious than a thousand times their weight in gold. And he was caught. Of course, there was the wife. But those were the days when a woman couldn't save a man, no matter how lovely she was. Tatman was taken to the edge of camp and given his pack and his gun—but no food. And the girl, hooded and booted, was at his side, for she was determined to die with him. For her sake Tatman had lied up to the last minute, protesting his innocence.

"But the beans and the potatoes were found in his cabin, and that was evidence enough. And then, just as they were about to go straight out into the blizzard that meant death within a few hours, then——"

Kent rose to his feet, and walked to the little window, and stood there, looking out. "Fingers, now and then a superman is born on earth. And a superman was there in that crowd of hunger-stricken and embittered men. At the last moment he stepped out and in a loud voice declared that Tatman was innocent and that he was guilty. Unafraid, he made a remarkable confession. He had stolen the beans and the potatoes and had slipped them into the Tatman cabin when they were asleep. Why? Because he

wanted to save the woman from hunger! Yes, he lied, Fingers. He lied because he loved the wife that belonged to another man—lied because in him there was a heart as true as any heart God ever made. He lied! And his lie was a splendid thing. He went out into that blizzard, strengthened by a love that was greater than his fear of death, and the camp never heard of him again. Tatman and his wife returned to their cabin and lived. Fingers——" Kent whirled suddenly from the window. "Fingers——"

And Fingers, like a sphynx, sat and stared at Kent.

"You were that man," Kent went on, coming nearer to him. "You lied, because you loved a woman, and you went out to face death because of that woman. The men at Lost City didn't know it, Fingers. The husband didn't know it. And the girl, that girl-wife you worshiped in secret, didn't dream of it! But that was the truth, and you know it deep down in your soul. You fought your way out. You lived! And all these years, down here on your porch, you've been dreaming of a woman, of the girl you were willing to die for a long time ago. Fingers, am I right? And if I am, will you shake hands?"

Slowly Fingers had risen from his chair. No longer were his eyes dull and lifeless, but flaming with a fire that Kent had lighted again after many years. And he reached out a hand and gripped Kent's, still

staring at him as though something had come back to him from the dead.

"I thank you, Kent, for your opinion of that man," he said. "Somehow, you haven't made me—ashamed. But it was only the shell of a man that won out after that day when I took Tatman's place. Something happened. I don't know what. But—you see me now. I never went back into the diggings. I degenerated. I became what I am."

"And you are today just what you were when you went out to die for Mary Tatman," cried Kent. "The same heart and the same soul are in you. Wouldn't you fight again today for her?"

A stifled cry came from Fingers' lips. "My God, yes, Kent—I would!"

"And that's why I wanted you, of all men, to come to me, Fingers," Kent went on swiftly. "To you, of all the men on earth, I wanted to tell my story. And now, will you listen to it? Will you forgive me for bringing up this memory that must be precious to you, only that you might more fully understand what I am going to say? I don't want you to think of it as a subterfuge on my part. It is more than that. It is—— Fingers, is it inspiration? Listen, and tell me."

And for a long time after that James Kent talked, and Fingers listened, the soul within him writhing and dragging itself back into fierce life, demanding for the first time in many years the something which

it had once possessed, but which it had lost. It was not the lazy, mysterious, silent Dirty Fingers who sat in the cell with Kent. In him the spirit of twenty years ago had roused itself from long slumber, and the thrill of it pounded in his blood. Two-Fisted Fingers they had called him then, and he was Two-Fisted Fingers in this hour with Kent. Twice Father Layonne came to the head of the cell alcove, but turned back when he heard the low and steady murmur of Kent's voice. Nothing did Kent keep hidden, and when he had finished, something that was like the fire of a revelation had come into Fingers' face.

"My God!" he breathed deeply. "Kent, I've been sitting down there on my porch a long time, and a good many strange things have come to me, but never anything like this. Oh, if it wasn't for this accursed flesh of mine!"

He jumped from his chair more quickly than he had moved in ten years, and he laughed as he had not laughed in all that time. He thrust out a great arm and doubled it up, like a prizefighter testing his muscle. "Old? I'm not old! I was only twenty-eight when that happened up there, and I'm forty-eight now. That isn't old. It's what is in me that's grown old. I'll do it, Kent! I'll do it, if I hang for it!"

Kent fairly leaped upon him. "God bless you!" he cried huskily. "God bless you, Fingers! Look! Look at that!" He pulled Fingers to the little window, and together they looked out upon the river,

shimmering gloriously under a sun-filled sky of blue. "Two thousand miles of it," he breathed. "Two thousand miles of it, running straight through the heart of that world we both have known! No, you're not old, Fingers. The things you used to know are calling you again, as they are calling me, for somewhere off there are the ghosts of Lost City, ghosts—and realities!"

"Ghosts—and hopes," said Fingers.

"Hopes make life," softly whispered Kent, as if to himself. And then, without turning from the window, his hand found Fingers' and clasped it tight. "It may be that mine, like yours, will never come true. But they're fine to think about, Fingers. Funny, isn't it, that their names should be so strangely alike—Mary and Marette? I say, Fingers——"

Heavy footsteps sounded in the hall. Both turned from the window as Constable Pelly came to the door of the cell. They recognized this intimation that their time was up, and with his foot Fingers roused his sleeping dog.

It was a new Fingers who walked back to the river five minutes later, and it was an amazed and discomfited dog who followed at his heels, for at times the misshapen and flesh-ridden Togs was compelled to trot for a few steps to keep up. And Fingers did not sink into the chair on the shady porch when he reached his shack. He threw off his coat and waistcoat and

rolled up his sleeves, and for hours after that he was buried deep in the accumulated masses of dust-covered legal treasures stored away in hidden corners of the Good Old Queen Bess.

CHAPTER XII

THAT morning Kent had heard wild songs floating up from the river, and now he felt like shouting forth his own joy and exultation in song. He wondered if he could hide the truth from the eyes of others, and especially from Kedsty if he came to see him. It seemed that some glimmer of the hope blazing within him must surely reveal itself, no matter how he tried to hold it back. He felt the vital forces of that hope more powerful within him now than in the hour when he had crept from the hospital window with freedom in his face. For then he was not sure of himself. He had not tested his physical strength. And in the present moment, fanned by his unbounded optimism, the thought came to him that perhaps it was good luck and not bad that had thrown Mercer in his way. For with Fingers behind him now, his chances for a clean get-away were better. He would not be taking a hazardous leap chanced on the immediate smiles of fortune. He would be going deliberately, prepared.

He blessed the man who had been known as Dirty Fingers, but whom he could not think of now in the terms of that name. He blessed the day he had heard that chance story of Fingers, far north. He no longer regarded him as the fat pig of a man he had been for

so many years. For he looked upon the miracle of a great awakening. He had seen the soul of Fingers lift itself up out of its tabernacle of flesh and grow young again; he had seen stagnant blood race with new fire. He had seen emotions roused that had slept for long years. And he felt toward Fingers, in the face of that awakening, differently than he had felt toward any other living man. His emotion was one of deep and embracing comradeship.

Father Layonne did not come again until afternoon, and then he brought information that thrilled Kent. The missioner had walked down to see Fingers, and Fingers was not on his porch. Neither was the dog. He had knocked loudly on the door, but there was no answer. Where was Fingers? Kent shook his head, feigning an anxious questioning, but inside him his heart was leaping. He knew! He told Father Layonne he was afraid all Fingers' knowledge of the law could do him but little good, that Fingers had told him as much, and the little missioner went away considerably depressed. He would talk with Fingers again, he said, and offer certain suggestions he had in mind. Kent chuckled when he was gone. How shocked *le Père* would be if he, too, could know!

The next morning Father Layonne came again, and his information was even more thrilling to Kent. The missioner was displeased with Fingers. Last night, noticing a light in his shack, he had walked down to see him. And he had found three men closely drawn

up about a table with Dirty Fingers. One of them was Ponte, the half-breed; another was Kinoo the outcast Dog Rib from over on Sand Creek; the third was Mooie, the old Indian trailer. Kent wanted to jump up and shout, for those three were the three greatest trailers in all that part of the Northland. Fingers had lost no time, and he wanted to voice his approbation like a small boy on the Fourth of July.

But his face, seen by Father Layonne, betrayed none of the excitement that was in his blood. Fingers had told him he was going into a timber deal with these men, a long-distance deal where there would be much traveling, and that he could not interrupt himself just then to talk about Kent. Would Father Layonne come again in the morning? And he had gone again that morning, and Fingers' place was locked up!

All the rest of the day Kent waited eagerly for Fingers. For the first time Kedsty came to see him, and as a matter of courtesy said he hoped Fingers might be of assistance to him. He did not mention Mercer and remained no longer than a couple of minutes, standing outside the cell. In the afternoon Doctor Cardigan came and shook hands warmly with Kent. He had found a tough job waiting for him, he said. Mercer was all cut up, in a literal as well as a mental way. He had five teeth missing, and he had to have seventeen stitches taken in his face. It was Cardigan's opinion that some one had given him a consid-

erable beating—and he grinned at Kent. Then he added in a whisper,

"My God, Kent, how I wish you had made it!"

It was four o'clock when Fingers came. Even less than yesterday did he look like the old Fingers. He was not wheezing. He seemed to have lost flesh. His face was alive. That was what struck Kent—the new life in it. There was color in his eyes. And Togs, the dog, was not with him. He smiled when he shook hands with Kent, and nodded, and chuckled. And Kent, after that, gripped him by the shoulders and shook him in his silent joy.

"I was up all last night," said Fingers in a low voice. "I don't dare move much in the day, or people will wonder. But, God bless my soul!—I did move last night, Kent. I must have walked ten miles, more or less. And things are coming—coming!"

"And Ponte, Kinoo, Mooie——?"

"Are working like devils," whispered Fingers. "It's the only way, Kent. I've gone through all my law, and there's nothing in man-made law that can save you. I've read your confession, and I don't think you could even get off with the penitentiary. A noose is already tied around your neck. I think you'd hang. We've simply got to get you out some other way. I've had a talk with Kedsty. He has made arrangements to have you sent to Edmonton two weeks from to-morrow. We'll need all that time, but it's enough."

For three days thereafter Fingers came to Kent's

cell each afternoon, and each time was looking better. Something was swiftly putting hardness into his flesh and form into his body. The second day he told Kent that he had found the way at last, and that when the hour came, escape would be easy, but he thought it best not to let Kent in on the little secret just yet. He must be patient and have faith. That was the chief thing, to have faith at all times, no matter what happened. Several times he emphasized that "no matter what happens." The third day he puzzled Kent. He was restless, a bit nervous. He still thought it best not to tell Kent what his scheme was, until tomorrow. He was in the cell not more than five or ten minutes, and there was an unusual pressure in the grip of his hand when he bade Kent good-by. Somehow Kent did not feel so well when he had gone.

He waited impatiently for the next day. It came, and hour after hour he listened for Fingers' heavy tread in the hall. The morning passed. The afternoon lengthened. Night came, and Fingers had not come. Kent did not sleep much between the hour when he went to bed and morning. It was eleven o'clock when the missioner made his call. Before he left, Kent gave him a brief note for Fingers. He had just finished his dinner, and Carter had taken the dishes away, when Father Layonne returned. A look at his face, and Kent knew that he bore unpleasant tidings.

"Fingers is an—an apostate," he said, his lips

twitching as if to keep back a denunciation still more emphatic. "He was sitting on his porch again this morning, half asleep, and says that after a great deal of thought he has come to the definite opinion that he can do nothing for you. He read your note and burned it with a match. He asked me to tell you that the scheme he had in mind was too risky—for him. He says he won't come up again. And——"

The missioner was rubbing his brown, knotted hands together raspingly.

"Go on," said Kent a little thickly.

"He has also sent Inspector Kedsty the same word," finished Father Layonne. "His word to Kedsty is that he can see no fighting chance for you, and that it is useless effort on his part to put up a defense for you. Jimmy!" His hand touched Kent's arm gently.

Kent's face was white. He faced the window, and for a space he did not see. Then with pencil and paper he wrote again to Fingers.

It was late in the afternoon before Father Layonne returned with an answer. Again it was verbal. Fingers had read his note and had burned it with a match. He was particular that the last scrap of it was turned into ash, the missioner said. And he had nothing to say to Kent that he had not previously said. He simply could not go on with their plans. And he requested Kent not to write to him again. He was sorry, but that was his definite stand in the matter.

Even then Kent could not bring himself to believe. All the rest of the day he tried to put himself in Fingers' brain, but his old trick of losing his personality in that of another failed him this time. He could find no reason for the sudden change in Fingers, unless it was what Fingers had frankly confessed to Father Layonne—fear. The influence of mind, in this instance, had failed in its assault upon a mass of matter. Fingers' nerve had gone back on him.

The fifth day Kent rose from his cot with hope still not quite dead in his heart. But that day passed and the sixth, and the missioner brought word that Fingers was the old Dirty Fingers again, sitting from morning till night on his porch.

On the seventh day came the final crash to Kent's hopes. Kedsty's program had changed. He, Kent, was to start for Edmonton the following morning under charge of Pelly and a special constable!

After this Kent felt a strange change come over him. Years seemed to multiply themselves in his body. His mind, beaten back, no longer continued in its old channels of thought. The thing pressed upon him now as fatalistic. Fingers had failed him. Fortune had failed him. Everything had failed, and for the first time in the weeks of his struggle against death and a thing worse than death, he cursed himself. There was a limit to optimism and a limit to hope. His limit was reached.

In the afternoon of this seventh day came a de-

pressing gloom. It was filled with a drizzling rain. Hour after hour this drizzle kept up, thickening as the night came. He ate his supper by the light of a cell lamp. By eight o'clock it was black outside. In that blackness there was an occasional flash of lightning and rumble of thunder. On the roof of the barracks the rain beat steadily and monotonously.

His watch was in his hand—it was a quarter after nine o'clock, when he heard the door at the far exit of the hall open and close. He had heard it a dozen times since supper and paid no attention to it, but this time it was followed by a voice at the detachment office that hit him like an electrical shock. Then, a moment later, came low laughter. It was a woman who laughed.

He stood up. He heard the detachment office door close, and silence followed. The watch in his hand seemed ticking off the seconds with frantic noise. He shoved it into his pocket and stood staring out into the prison alcove. A few minutes later the office door opened again. This time it was not closed. He heard distinctly a few light, hesitating footsteps, and his heart seemed to stop its beating. They came to the head of the lighted alcove, and for perhaps the space of a dozen seconds there was silence again. Then they advanced.

Another moment, and Kent was staring through the bars into the glorious eyes of Marette Radisson!

CHAPTER XIII

IN that moment Kent did not speak. He made no sound. He gave no sign of welcome, but stood in the middle of his cell, staring. If life had hung upon speech in those few seconds, he would have died, but everything he would have said, and more, was in his face. The girl must have seen it. With her two hands she was gripping at the bars of the cell and looking through at him. Kent saw that her face was pale in the lamp glow. In that pallor her violet eyes were like pools of black. The hood of her dripping raincoat was thrown partly back, and against the whiteness of her cheeks her hair glistened wet, and her long lashes were heavy with the rain.

Kent, without moving over the narrow space between them, reached out his hands and found his voice. "Marette!"

Her hands had tightened about the bars until they were bloodless. Her lips were parted. She was breathing quickly, but she did not smile; she made no response to his greeting, gave no sign even of recognition. What happened after that was so sudden and amazing that his heart stopped dead still. Without warning she stepped back from the cell and began to scream and then drew away from him, still

facing him and still screaming, as if something had terrified her.

Kent heard the crash of a chair in the detachment office, excited voices, and the running of feet. Marette Radisson had withdrawn to the far corner of the alcove, and as Carter and Pelly ran toward her, she stood, a picture of horror, pointing at Kent's cell. The two constables rushed past her. Close behind them followed the special officer detailed to take Kent to Edmonton.

Kent had not moved. He was like one petrified. Close up against the bars came the faces of Pelly, Carter, and the special constable, filled with the expressions of men who had expected to look in upon tragedy. And then, behind their backs, Kent saw the other thing happen. Swift as a flash Marette Radisson's hand went in and out of her raincoat, and at the backs of the three men she was leveling a revolver! Not only did Kent see that swift change, but the still swifter change that came into her face. Her eyes shot to his just once, and they were filled with a laughing, exultant fire. With one mighty throb Kent's heart seemed to leap out through the bars of his prison, and at the look in his face and eyes Carter swung suddenly around.

"Please don't make any disturbance, gentlemen," said Marette Radisson. "The first man that makes a suspicious move, I shall kill!"

Her voice was calm and thrilling. It had a deadly

ring in it. The revolver in her hand was held steadily. It was a slim-barreled, black thing. The very color of it was menacing. And behind it were the girl's eyes, pools of flame. The three men were facing them now, shocked to speechlessness. Automatically they seemed to obey her command to throw up their hands. Then she leveled her grim little gun straight at Pelly's heart.

"You have the key," she said. "Unlock the cell!" Pelly fumbled and produced the key. She watched him closely. Then suddenly the special constable dropped his arms with a coarse laugh. "A pretty trick," he said, "but the bluff won't work!"

"Oh, but it will!" came the reply.

The little black gun was shifted to him, even as the constable's fingers touched his revolver holster. With half-smiling lips, Marette's eyes blazed at him.

"Please put up your hands," she commanded.

The constable hesitated; then his fingers gripped the butt of his gun. Kent, holding his breath, saw the almost imperceptible tensing of Marette's body and the wavering of Pelly's arms over his head. Another moment and he, too, would have called the bluff if it were that. But that moment did not come. From the slim, black barrel of the girl's revolver leaped forth a sudden spurt of smoke and flame, and the special constable lurched back against the cell bars, caught himself as he half fell, and then stood with his pistol arm

hanging limp and useless at his side. He had not made a sound, but his face was twisted in pain.

"Open the cell door!"

A second time the deadly-looking little gun was pointed straight at Pelly's heart. The half-smile was gone from the girl's lips now. Her eyes blazed a deeper fire. She was breathing quickly, and she leaned a little toward Pelly, repeating her command. The words were partly drowned in a sudden crash of thunder. But Pelly understood. He saw her lips form the words, and half heard,

"Open the door, or I shall kill you!"

He no longer hesitated. The key grated in the lock, and Kent himself flung the door wide open and sprang out. He was quick to see and seize upon opportunity and swift to act. The astounding audacity of the girl's ruse, her clever acting in feigning horror to line the guards up at the cell door and the thrilling decisiveness with which she had used the little black gun in her hand set every drop of blood in his body afire. No sooner was he outside his cell than he was the old Jim Kent, fighting man. He whipped Carter's automatic out of its holster and, covering Pelly and the special constable, relieved them of their guns. Behind him he heard Marette's voice, calm and triumphant,

"Lock them in the cell, Mr. Kent!"

He did not look at her, but swung his gun on Pelly and the special constable, and they backed through

the door into the cell. Carter had not moved. He was looking straight at the girl, and the little black gun was leveled at his breast. Pelly and the wounded man did not see, but on Carter's lips was a strange smile. His eyes met Kent's, and there was revealed for an instant a silent flash of comradeship and an unmistakable something else. Carter was glad! It made Kent want to reach out and grip his hand, but in place of that he backed him into the cell, turned the key in the lock, and with the key in his hand faced Marette Radisson. Her eyes were shining gloriously. He had never seen such splendid, fighting eyes, nor the birdlike swiftness with which she turned and ran down the hall, calling him to follow her.

He was only a step behind her in passing Kedsty's office. She reached the outer door and opened it. It was pitch-dark outside, and a deluge of rain beat into their faces. He observed that she did not replace the hood of her raincoat when she darted out. As he closed the door, her hand groped to his arm and from that found his hand. Her fingers clung to his tightly.

He did not ask questions as they faced the black chaos of rain. A rending streak of lightning revealed her for an instant, her bare head bowed to the wind. Then came a crash of thunder that shook the earth under their feet, and her fingers closed more tightly about his hand. And in that crash he heard her voice, half laughing, half broken, saying,

"I'm afraid—of thunder!"

In that storm his laugh rang out, a great, free, joyous laugh. He wanted to stop in that instant, sweep her up into his arms, and carry her. He wanted to shout like an insane man in his mad joy. And a moment before she had risked everything in facing three of the bravest men in the service and had shot one of them! He started to say something, but she increased her speed until she was almost running.

She was not leading Jim in the direction of the river, but toward the forest beyond Kedsty's bungalow. Not for an instant did she falter in that drenched and impenetrable darkness. There was something imperative in the clasp of her fingers, even though they tightened perceptibly when the thunder crashed. They gave Kent the conviction that there was no doubt in her mind as to the point she was striving for. He took advantage of the lightning, for each time it gave him a glimpse of her bare, wet head bowed to the storm, her white profile, and her slim figure fighting over the sticky earth under her feet.

It was this presence of her, and not the thought of escape, that exalted him now. She was at his side. Her hand lay close in his. The lightning gave him glimpses of her. He felt the touch of her shoulder, her arm, her body, as they drew close together. The life and warmth and thrill of her seemed to leap into his own veins through the hand he held. He had dreamed of her. And now suddenly she had become a part of him, and the glory of it rode overwhelmingly

over all other emotions that were struggling in his brain—the glory of the thought that it was she who had come to him in the last moment, who had saved him, and who was now leading him to freedom through the crash of storm.

At the crest of a low knoll between barracks and Kedsty's bungalow she stopped for the first time. He had there, again, the almost irresistible impulse to reach out in the darkness and take her into his arms, crying out to her of his joy, of a happiness that had come to him greater even than the happiness of freedom. But he stood, holding her hand, his tongue speechless, and he was looking at her when the lightning revealed her again. In a rending flash it cut open the night so close that the hiss of it was like the passing of a giant rocket, and involuntarily she shrank against him, and her free hand caught his arm at the instant thunder crashed low over their heads. His own hand groped out, and in the blackness it touched for an instant her wet face and then her drenched hair.

"Marette," he cried, "where are we going?"

"Down there," came her voice.

Her hand had left his arm, and he sensed that she was pointing, though he could not see. Ahead of them was a chaotic pit of gloom, a sea of blackness, and in the heart of that sea he saw a light. He knew that it was a lamp in one of Kedsty's windows and that Marette was guiding herself by that light when she started down the slope with her hand still in his. That she

had made no effort to withdraw it made him unconscious of the almost drowning discomfort of the fresh deluge of rain that beat their faces. One of her fingers had gripped itself convulsively about hi thumb, like a child afraid of falling. And each time the thunder crashed that soft hold on his thumb tightened, and Kent's soul acclaimed.

They drew swiftly nearer to the light, for it was not far from the knoll to Kedsty's place. Kent's mind leaped ahead. A little west by north from the inspector's bungalow was Kim's Bayou and it was undoubtedly to the forest trail over which she had gone at least once before, on the night of the mysterious assault upon Mooie, that Marette was leading him. Questions began to rush upon him now, immediate demanding questions. They were going to the river. They must be going to the river. It was the quickest and surest way of escape. Had Marette prepared for that? And was she going with him?

He had no time to answer. Their feet struck the gravel path leading to the door of Kedsty's place, and straight up this path the girl turned, straight toward the light blazing in the window. Then, to his amazement, he heard in the sweep of storm her voice crying out in glad triumph,

"We're home!"

Home! His breath came in a sudden gulp. He was more than astounded. He was shocked. Was she mad or playing an amazingly improper joke? She

had freed him from a cell to lead him to the home of the Inspector of Police, the deadliest enemy the world now held for him. He stopped, and Marette Radisson tugged at his hand, pulling him after her, insisting that he follow. She was clutching his thumb as though she thought he might attempt to escape.

"It is safe, M'sieu Jeems," she cried. "Don't be afraid!"

M'sieu Jeems! And the laughing note of mockery in her voice! He rallied himself and followed her up the three steps to the door. Her hand found the latch, the door opened, and swiftly they were inside. The lamp in the window was close to them, but for a space he could not see because of the water in his eyes. He blinked it out, drew a hand across his face, and looked at Marette. She stood three or four paces from him. Her face was very white, and she was panting as if hard-run for breath, but her eyes were shining, and she was smiling at him. The water was running from her in streams.

"You are wet," she said. "And I am afraid you will catch cold. Come with me!"

Again she was making fun of him just as she had made fun of him at Cardigan's! She turned, and he ran upstairs behind her. At the top she waited for him, and as he came up, she reached out her hand, as if apologizing for having taken it from him when they entered the bungalow. He held it again as she led him down the hall to a door farthest from the

stair. This she opened, and they entered. It was dark inside, and the girl withdrew her hand again, and Kent heard her moving across the room. In that darkness a new and thrilling emotion possessed him. The air he was breathing was not the air he had breathed in the hall. In it was the sweet scent of flowers, and of something else—the faint and intangible perfume of a woman's room. He waited, staring. His eyes were wide when a match leaped into flame in Marette's fingers. Then he stood in the glow of a lamp.

He continued to stare in the stupidity of a shock to which he was not accustomed. Marette, as if to give him time to acquaint himself with his environment, was taking off her raincoat. Under it her slim little figure was dry, except where the water had run down from her uncovered head to her shoulders. He noticed that she wore a short skirt, and boots, adorably small boots of splendidly worked caribou. And then suddenly she came toward him with both hands reaching out to him.

"Please shake hands and say you're glad," she said. "Don't look so—so—frightened. This is my room and you are safe here."

He held her hands tight, staring into the wonderful, violet eyes that were looking at him with the frank and unembarrassed directness of a child's. "I—I don't understand," he struggled. "Marette, where is Kedsty?"

"He should be returning very soon"

"And he knows you are here, of course?"

She nodded. "I have been here for a month."

Kent's hands closed tighter about hers. "I—I don't understand," he repeated. "Tonight Kedsty will know that it was you who rescued me and you who shot Constable Willis. Good God, we must lose no time in getting away!"

"There is great reason why Kedsty dare not betray my presence in his house," she said quietly. "He would die first! And he will not suspect that I have brought you to my room, that an escaped murderer is hiding under the very roof of the Inspector of Police! They will search for you everywhere but here! Isn't it splendid? He planned it all, every move, even to the screaming in front of your cell——"

"You mean—Kedsty?"

She withdrew her hands and stepped back from him, and again he saw in her eyes a flash of the fire that had come into them when she leveled her gun at the three men in the prison alcove. "No, not Kedsty. He would hang you, and he would kill me, if he dared. I mean that great, big, funny-looking friend of yours, M'sieu Fingers!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE manner in which Kent stared at Marette Radisson after her announcement that it was Dirty Fingers who had planned his escape must have been, he thought afterward, little less than imbecile. He had wronged Fingers, he believed. He had called him a coward and a backslider. In his mind he had reviled him for helping to raise his hopes to the highest pitch, only to smash them in the end. And all the time Dirty Fingers had been planning this! Kent began to grin. The thing was clear in a moment—that is, the immediate situation was clear—or he thought it was. But there were questions—one, ten, a hundred of them. They wanted to pile over the end of his tongue, questions that had little or nothing to do with Kedsty. He saw nothing now but Marette.

She had begun to take down her hair. It fell about her in wet, shining masses. Kent had never seen anything like it. It clung to her face, her neck, her shoulders and arms, and shrouded her slender body to her hips, lovely in its confusion. Little drops of water glistened in it like diamonds in the lamp glow, trickling down and dropping to the floor. It was like a glowing coat of velvety sable beaten by storm. Marette ran her arms up through it, shaking it out in clouds, and

a mist of rain leaped out from it, some of it striking Kent in the face. He forgot Fingers. He forgot Kedsty. His brain flamed only with the electrifying nearness of her. It was the thought of her that had inspired the greatest hope in him. It was his dreams of her, somewhere on the Big River, that had given him his great courage to believe in the ultimate of things. And now time and space had taken a leap backward. She was not four or five hundred miles north. There was no long quest ahead of him. She was here, within a few feet of him, tossing the wet from that glorious hair he had yearned to touch, brushing it out now, with her back toward him, in front of her mirror.

And as he sat there, uttering no word, looking at her, the demands of the immense responsibility that had fallen upon him and of the great fight that lay ahead pounded within him with naked fists. Fingers had planned. She had executed. It was up to him to finish.

He saw her, not as a creature to win, but as a priceless possession. Her fight had now become his fight. The rain was beating against the window near him. Out there was blackness, the river, the big world. His blood leaped with the old fighting fire. They were going tonight; they must be going tonight! Why should they wait? Why should they waste time under Kedsty's roof when freedom lay out there for the taking? He watched the swift movements of her hand,

listened to the silken rustle of the brush as it smoothed out her long hair. Bewilderment, reason, desire for action fought inside him.

Suddenly she faced him again. "It has just this moment occurred to me," she said, "that you haven't said 'Thank you.'"

So suddenly that he startled her he was at her side. He did not hesitate this time, as he had hesitated in his room at Cardigan's place. He caught her two hands in his, and with them he felt the soft, damp crush of her hair between his fingers. Words tumbled from his lips. He could not remember afterward all that he said. Her eyes widened, and they never for an instant left his own. Thank her! He told her what had happened to him—in the heart and soul of him—from the hour she had come to him at Cardigan's. He told her of dreams and plans, of his determination to find her again after he had escaped, if it took him all his life. He told her of Mercer, of his discovery of her visit to Kim's Bayou, of his scheme to follow her down the Three Rivers, to seek for her at Fort Simpson, to follow her to the Valley of Silent Men, wherever it was. Thank her! He held her hands so tight they hurt, and his voice trembled. Under the cloud of her hair a slow fire burned in Marette Radisson's cheeks. But it did not show in her eyes. They looked at him so steadily, so unfalteringly, that his own face burned before he had finished what was in

his mind to say, and he freed her hands and stepped back from her again.

"Forgive me for saying all that," he entreated. "But it's true. You came to me there, at Cardigan's place, like something I'd always dreamed about, but never expected to find. And you came to me again, at the cell, like——"

"Yes, I know how I came," she interrupted him. "Through the mud and the rain, Mr. Kent. And it was so black I lost my way and was terrified to think that I might not find barracks. I was half an hour behind Mr. Fingers' schedule. For that reason I think Inspector Kedsty may return at any moment, and you must not talk so loud—or so much."

"Lord!" he breathed in a whisper. "I have said a lot in a short time, haven't I? But it isn't a hundredth part of what I want to get out of my system. I won't ask the million questions that want to be asked. But I must know why we are here. Why have we come to Kedsty's? Why didn't we make for the river? There couldn't be a better night to get away."

"But it is not so good as the fifth night from now will be," she said, resuming the task of drying her hair. "On that night you may go to the river. Our plans were a little upset, you know, by Inspector Kedsty's change in the date on which you were to leave for Edmonton. Arrangements have been made so that on the fifth night you may leave safely."

"And you?"

"I shall remain here." And then she added in a low voice that struck his heart cold, "I shall remain to pay Kedsty the price which he will ask for what has happened tonight."

"Good God!" he cried. "Marette!"

She turned on him swiftly. "No, no, I don't mean that he will hurt me," she cried, a fierce little note in her voice. "I would kill him before that! I'm sorry I told you. But you must not question me. You shall not!"

She was trembling. He had never seen her excited like that before, and as she stood there before him, he knew that he was not afraid for her in the way that had flashed into his mind. She had not spoken empty words. She would fight. She would kill, if it was necessary to kill. And he saw her, all at once, as he had not seen her before. He remembered a painting which he had seen a long time ago in Montreal. It was *L'Esprit de la Solitude*—The Spirit of the Wild—painted by Conné, the picturesque French-Canadian friend of Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal, and a genius of the far backwoods who had drawn his inspiration from the heart of the wilderness itself. And that painting stood before him now in flesh and blood, its crudeness gone, but the marvelous spirit it had breathed remaining. Shrouded in her tumbled hair, her lips a little parted, every line of her slender body vibrant with an emotion which seemed consuming her, her beautiful eyes aglow with

its fire, he saw in her, as Conné must have seen at another time, the soul of the great North itself. She seemed to him to breathe of the God's country far down the Three Rivers; of its almost savage fearlessness; its beauty, its sunshine, and its storm; its tragedy, its pathos, and its song. In her was the courage and the glory of that North. He had seen; and now he felt these things, and the thrill of them swept over him like an inundation.

He had heard her soft laugh, she had made fun of him when he thought he was dying; she had kissed him, she had fought for him, she had clung in terror to his hand when the lightning flashed; and now she stood with her little hands clenched in her hair, like a storm about to break. A moment ago she was so near that he had almost taken her in his arms. Now, in an instant, she had placed something so vast between them that he would not have dared to touch her hand or her hair. Like sun and cloud and wind she changed, and for him each change added to the wonder of her. And now it was storm. He saw it in her eyes, her hands, her body. He felt the electrical nearness of it in those low-spoken, trembling words, *"You shall not!"* The room seemed surcharged for a moment with impending shock. And then his physical eyes took in again the slimness of her, seized upon the alluring smallness of her and the fact that he could have tossed her to the ceiling without great effort. And yet he saw her as one sees a goddess.

"No, I won't ask you questions, when you look at me like that," he said, finding his tongue. "I won't ask you what this price is that Kedsty may demand, because you're not going to pay it. If you won't go with me, I won't go. I'd rather stay here and be hung. I'm not asking you questions, so please don't shoot, but if you told me the truth, and you belong in the North, you're going back with me—or I'm not going. I'll not budge an inch."

She drew a deep breath, as if something had greatly relieved her. Again her violet eyes came out from the shadow into sunlight, and her trembling mouth suddenly broke into a smile. It was not apologetic. There was about it a quick and spontaneous gladness which she made no effort at all to conceal.

"That is nice of you," she said. "I'm glad to hear you say it. I never knew how pleasant it was to have some one who was willing to be hung for me. But you will go. And I will not go. There isn't time to explain all about it just now, for Inspector Kedsty will be here very soon, and I must dry my hair and show you your hiding-place—if you have to hide."

She began to brush her hair again. In the mirror Kent caught a glimpse of the smile still trembling on her lips.

"I'm not questioning you," he guarded himself again, "but if you could only understand how anxious I am to know where Kedsty is, how Fingers found you, why you made us believe you were leaving the Landing

and then returned—and—how badly I want to know something about you—I almost believe you'd talk a little while you are drying your hair."

"It was Mooie, the old Indian," she said. "It was he who found out in some way that I was here, and then M'sieu Fingers came himself one night when the Inspector was away—got in through a window and simply said that you had sent him, when I was just about to shoot him. You see, I knew you weren't going to die. Kedsty had told me that. I was going to help you in another way, if M'sieu Fingers hadn't come. Inspector Kedsty was over there tonight, at his cabin, when the thing happened down there. It was a part of Fingers' scheme—to keep him out of the way."

Suddenly she grew rigid. The brush remained poised in her hair. Kent, too, heard the sound that she had heard. It was a loud tapping at one of the curtained windows, the tapping of some metallic object. And that window was fifteen feet above the ground!

With a little cry the girl threw down her brush, ran to the window, and raised and lowered the curtain once. Then she turned to Kent, swiftly dividing her hair into thick strands and weaving them into a braid.

"It is Mooie," she cried. "Kedsty is coming!"

She caught his hand and hurried him toward the head of the bed, where two long curtains were strung on a wire. She drew these apart. Behind them were

what seemed to Kent an innumerable number of feminine garments.

"You must hide in them, if you have to," she said, the excited little tremble in her voice again. "I don't think it will come to that, but if it does, you must! Bury yourself way back in them, and keep quiet. If Kedsty finds you are here——"

She looked into his eyes, and it seemed to Kent that there was something which was very near to fear in them now.

"If he should find you here, it would mean something terrible for me," she went on, her hands creeping to his arms. "I can not tell you what it is now, but it would be worse than death. Will you promise to stay here, no matter what happens down there, no matter what you may hear? Will you—Mr. Kent?"

"Not if you call me Mr. Kent," he said, something thickening in his throat.

"Will you—Jeems? Will you—no matter what happens—if I promise—when I come back—to kiss you?"

Her hands slipped almost caressingly from his arms, and then she had turned swiftly and was gone through the partly open door, closing it after her, before he could give his promise.

CHAPTER XV

FOR a space he stood where she had left him, staring at the door through which she had gone. The nearness of her in those last few seconds of her presence, the caressing touch of her hands, what he had seen in her eyes, her promise to kiss him if he did not reveal himself—these things, and the thought of the splendid courage that must be inspiring her to face Kedsty now, made him blind even to the door and the wall at which he was apparently looking. He saw only her face, as he had seen it in that last moment—her eyes, the tremble of her lips, and the fear which she had not quite hidden from him. She was afraid of Kedsty. He was sure of it. For she had not smiled; there was no flicker of humor in her eyes, when she called him Jeems, an intimate use of the names Jim and James in the far North. It was not facetiously that she had promised to kiss him. An almost tragic seriousness had possessed her. And it was that seriousness that thrilled him—that, and the amazing frankness with which she had coupled the name Jeems with the promise of her lips. Once before she had called him Jeems. But it was M'sieu Jeems then, and there had been a bit of taunting laughter in her voice. Jim or James meant nothing, but Jeems—He had heard

mothers call little children that, in moments of endearment. He knew that wives and sweethearts used it in that same way. For Jim and James were not uncommon names up and down the Three Rivers, even among the half-breeds and French, and Jeems was the closer and more intimate thing bred of it.

His heart was thumping riotously as he went to the door and listened. A little while ago, when she faced him with flashing eyes, commanding him not to question her, he had felt an abyss under his feet. Now he was on a mountain. And he knew that no matter what he heard, unless it was her cry for help, he would not go down.

After a little he opened the door a mere crack so that sound might come to him. She had not forbidden that. Through the crack he could see a dim glow of light in the lower hall. But he heard no sound, and it occurred to him that old Mooie could still run swiftly, and that it might be some time before Kedsty would arrive.

As he waited, he looked about the room. His first impression was that Marette must have lived in it for a long time. It was a woman's room, without the newness of sudden and unpremeditated occupancy. He knew that formerly it had been Kedsty's room, but nothing of Kedsty remained in it now. And then, as his wondering eyes beheld the miracle, a number of things struck him with amazing significance. He no longer doubted that Marette Radisson was of the far

Northland. His faith in that was absolute. If there had been a last question in his mind, it was wiped away because she called him Jeems. Yet this room seemed to give the lie to his faith. Fascinated by his discovery of things, he drew away from the door and stood over the dressing-table in front of the mirror.

Marette had not prepared the room for him, and her possessions were there. It did not strike him as sacrilege to look at them, the many intimate little things that are mysteriously used in the process of a lady's toilette. It was their number and variety that astounded him. He might have expected them in the boudoir of the Governor General's daughter at Ottawa, but not here—and much less farther north. What he saw was of exquisite material and workmanship. And then, as if attracted by a magnet, his eyes were drawn to something else. It was a row of shoes neatly and carefully arranged on the floor at one side of the dressing-table.

He stared at them, astounded. Never had he seen such an array of feminine footwear intended for the same pair of feet. And it was not Northern footwear. Every individual little beauty in that amazing row stood on a high heel! Their variety was something to which he had long been a stranger. There were buttoned boots, laced boots, brown boots, black boots, and white boots, with dangerously high and fragile looking heels; there were dainty little white kid slippers, slippers with bows, slippers with cut steel buckles, and

slippers with dainty ribbon ties; there were high-heeled oxfords and high-heeled patent leather pumps! He gasped. He reached over, moved by an automatic sort of impulse, and took a satiny little pump in his hand.

The size of it gave him a decidedly pleasant mental shock, and, beginning to feel like one prying into a sleeper's secrets, he looked inside it. The size was there—number three. And it had come from Favre's in Montreal! One after another he looked inside half a dozen others. And all of them had come from Favre's in Montreal.

The little shoes, more than all else that he had seen or that had happened, sent a question pounding through his brain. Who was Marette Radisson?

And that question was followed by other questions, until they tumbled over one another in his head. If she was from Montreal, why was she going north? If she belonged in the North, if she was a part of it, why was she taking all of this apparently worthless footwear with her? Why had she come to Athabasca Landing? What was she to Kedsty? Why was she hiding under his roof? Why——

He stopped himself, trying to find some one answer in all that chaos of questions. It was impossible for him to take his eyes from the shoes. A thought seized him. Ludicrously he dropped upon his knees in front of the row and with a face growing hotter each moment examined them all. But he wanted to know. And the discovery he made was that most of the foot-

wear had been worn, some of it so slightly, however, that the impression of the foot was barely visible.

He rose to his feet and continued his inquiry. Of course she had expected him to look about. One couldn't help seeing, unless one were blind. He would have cut off a hand before opening one of the dressing-table drawers. But Marette herself had told him to hide behind the curtains if it became necessary, and it was an excusable caution for him to look behind those curtains now, to see what sort of hiding-place he had. He returned to the door first and listened. There was still no sound from below. Then he drew the curtains apart, as Marette had drawn them. Only he looked longer. He would tell her about it when she returned, if the act needed an apology.

His impression was a man's impression. What he saw was a billowing, filmy mass of soft stuff, and out of it there greeted him the faintest possible scent of lilac sachet powder. He closed the curtains with a deep breath of utter joy and of consternation. The two emotions were a jumble to him. The shoes, all that mass of soft stuff behind the curtains, were exquisitely feminine. The breath of perfume had come to him straight out of a woman's soul. There were seduction and witchery to it. He saw Marette, an enrapturing vision of loveliness, floating before his eyes in that sacred and mysterious vestment of which he had stolen a half-frightened glimpse. In white—the white, cobwebby thing of laces and embroidery

that had hung straight before his eyes—in white—with her glorious black hair, her violet eyes, her——

And then it was that the incongruity of the thing, the almost sheer impossibility of it, clashed in upon his vision. Yet his faith was not shaken. Marette Radisson was of the North. He could not disbelieve that, even in the face of these amazing things that confronted him.

Suddenly he heard a sound that was like the explosion of a gun under his feet. It was the opening and closing of the hall door—but mostly the closing. The slam of it shook the house and rattled the glass in the windows. Kedsty had returned, and he was in a rage. Kent extinguished the light so that the room was in darkness. Then he went to the door. He could hear the quick, heavy tread of Kedsty's feet. After that came the closing of a second door, followed by the rumble of Kedsty's voice. Kent was disappointed.

The Inspector of Police and Marette were in a room too far distant for him to distinguish what was said. But he knew that Kedsty had returned to barracks and had discovered what had happened there. After an interval his voice was a steady rumble. It rose higher. He heard the crash of a chair. Then the voice ceased, and after it came the tramping of Kedsty's feet. Not once did he catch the sound of Marette's voice, but he was sure that in the interval of silence she was talking. Then Kedsty's voice broke forth more furiously than before. Kent's fingers dug

into the sill of the door. Each moment added to his conviction that Marette was in danger. It was not physical violence he feared. He did not believe Kedsty capable of perpetrating that upon a woman. It was fear that he would take her to barracks. The fact that Marette had told him there was a powerful reason why Kedsty would not do this failed to assure him. For she had also told him that Kedsty would kill her, if he dared. He held himself in readiness. At a cry from her, or the first move on Kedsty's part to take her from the bungalow, he would give battle in spite of Marette's warning.

He almost hoped one of these two things would happen. As he stood there, listening, waiting, the thought became almost a prayer. He had Pelly's revolver. Within twenty seconds he could have Kedsty looking down the barrel of it. The night was ideal for escape. Within half an hour they would be on the river. They could even load up with provisions from Kedsty's place. He opened the door a little more, scarcely making an effort to combat the impulse that dragged him out. Marette must be in danger, or she would not have confessed to him that she was in the house of a man who would like to see her dead. Why she was there did not interest him deeply now. It was the fact of the moment that was moving him swiftly toward action.

The door below opened again, and Kent's body grew rigid. He heard Kedsty charging through the lower

hall like a mad bull. The outer door opened, slammed shut, and he was gone.

Kent drew back into the darkness of his room. It was some moments before he heard Marette coming slowly up the stairs. She seemed to be groping her way, though there was a dim illumination out there. Then she came through the door into the blackness of her room.

"Jeems," she whispered.

He went to her. Her hands reached out, and again they rested on his arms.

"You—you didn't come down the stair?"

"No."

"You—didn't hear?"

"I heard no words. Only Kedsty's voice."

It seemed to him that her voice, when she spoke again, trembled with an immeasurable relief. "You were good, Jeems. I am glad."

In that darkness he could not see. Yet something reached into him, thrilling him, quickening his pulse with a thing to which his eyes were blind. He bent down. He found her lips upturned, offering him the sweetness of the kiss which was to be his reward; and as he felt their warmth upon his own, he felt also the slightest pressure of her hands upon his arms.

"He is gone. We will light the lamp again," she said then.

CHAPTER XVI

KENT stood still while Marette moved in that gloom, found matches, and lighted the lamp. He had not spoken a word after the kiss. He had not taken advantage of it. The gentle pressure of her hands had restrained him from taking her in his arms. But the kiss itself fired him with a wild and glorious thrill that was like a vibrant music to which every atom of life in his body responded. If he claimed his reward at all, he had expected her kiss to be perhaps indifferent, at least neutral. But the lips she had given him there in the darkness of the room were warm, living, breathing lips. They had not been snatched away from him too quickly. Their sweetness, for an instant, had lingered.

Then, in the lamp glow, he was looking into Marette Radisson's face. He knew that his own was aflame. He had no desire to hide its confession, and he was eager to find what lay in her own eyes. And he was astonished, and then startled. The kiss had not disturbed Marette. It was as if it had never happened.

She was not embarrassed, and there was no hint of color in her face. It was her deathly whiteness that startled him, a pallor emphasized by the dark masses

of her hair, and a strange glow in her eyes. It was not a glow brought there by the kiss. It was fear, fading slowly out of them as he looked, until at last it was gone, and her lips trembled with an apologetic smile.

"He was very angry," she said. "How easily some men lose their tempers, don't they—Jeems?"

The little break in her voice, her brave effort to control herself, and the whimsical bit of smile that accompanied her words made him want to do what the gentle pressure of her hands had kept him from doing a few moments before—pick her up in his arms. What she was trying to hide he saw plainly. She had been in danger, a danger greater than that which she had quietly and fearlessly faced at barracks. And she was still afraid of that menace. It was the last thing which she wanted him to know, and yet he knew it. A new force swept through him. It was the force which comes of mastery, of possessorship, of fighting grimly against odds. It rose in a mighty triumph. It told him this girl belonged to him, that she was his to fight for. And he was going to fight. Marette saw the change that came into his face. For a moment after she had spoken there was silence between them. Outside the storm beat in a fiercer blast. A roll of thunder crashed over the bungalow. The windows rattled in a sweep of wind and rain. Kent, looking at her, his muscles hardening, his face growing grimmer, nodded toward the window at which Mooie's signal had come.

"It is a splendid night—for us," he said. "And we must go."

She did not answer.

"In the eyes of the law I am a murderer," he went on. "You saved me. You shot a man. In those same eyes you are a criminal. It is folly to remain here. It is sheer suicide for both of us. If Kedsty——"

"If Kedsty does not do what I told him to do to-night, I shall kill him!" she said.

The quietness of her words, the steadiness of her eyes, held him speechless. Again it seemed to him, as it had seemed to him in his room at Cardigan's place, that it was a child who was looking at him and speaking to him. If she had shown fear a few moments before, that fear was not revealed in her face now. She was not excited. Her eyes were softly and quietly beautiful. She amazed him and discomfited him. Against that child-like sureness he felt himself helpless. Its potency was greater than his strength and greater than his determination. It placed between them instantly a vast gulf, a gulf that might be bridged by prayer and entreaty, but never by force. There was no hint of excitement in her threat against Kedsty, and yet in the very calmness of it he felt its deadliness.

A whimsical half-smile was trembling on her lips again, and a warmer glow came into her eyes. "Do you know," she said, "that according to an old and sacred code of the North you belong to me?"

"I have heard of that code," he replied. "A hundred

years ago I should have been your slave. If it exists today, I am happy."

"Yes, you see the point, Jeems, don't you? You were about to die, probably. I think they would have hanged you. And I saved your life. Therefore your life belongs to me, for I insist that the code still lives. You are my property, and I am going to do with you as I please, until I turn you over to the Rivers. And you are not going tonight. You shall wait here for Laselle and his brigade."

"Laselle—Jean Laselle?"

She nodded. "Yes, that is why you must wait. We have made a splendid arrangement. When Laselle and his brigade start north, you go with them. And no one will ever know. You are safe here. No one will think of looking for you under the roof of the Inspector of Police."

"But you, Marette!" He caught himself, remembering her injunction not to question her. Marette shrugged her slim shoulders the slightest bit and nodded for him to look upon what she knew he had already seen, her room.

"It is not uncomfortable," she said. "I have been here for a number of weeks, and nothing has happened to me. I am quite safe. Inspector Kedsty has not looked inside that door since the day your big red-headed friend saw me down in the poplars. He has not put a foot on the stair. That is the dead-line. And —I know—you are wondering. You are asking your-

self a great many questions—*a bon droit,* M'sieu Jeems. You are burning up with them. I can see it. And I——"

There was something suddenly pathetic about her, as she sank into the big-armed, upholstered chair which had been Kedsty's favorite reading chair. She was tired, and for a moment it seemed to Kent that she was almost ready to cry. Her fingers twisted nervously at the shining end of the braid in her lap, and more than ever he thought how slim and helpless she was, yet how gloriously unafraid, how unconquerable with that something within her that burned like the fire of a dynamo. The flame of that force had gone down now, as though the fire itself was dying out; but when she raised her eyes to him, looking up at him from out of the big chair, he knew that back of the yearning, child-like glow that lay in them the heart of that fire was living and unquenchable. Again, for him, she had ceased to be a woman. It was the soul of a child that lay in her wide-open, wonderfully blue eyes. Twice before he had seen that miracle, and it held him now, as it had held him that first time when she had stood with her back at Cardigan's door. And as it had changed then, so it changed now, slowly, and she was a woman again, with that great gulf of unapproachableness between them. But the yearning was still there, revealing itself to him, and yet, like the sun, infinitely remote from him.

"I wish that I might answer those questions for

you," she said, in a voice that was low and tired. "I should like to have you know, because I—I have great faith in you, Jeems. But I cannot. It is impossible. It is inconceivable. If I did——" She made a hopeless little gesture. "If I told you everything, you would not like me any more. And I want you to like me—until you go north with M'sieu Jean and his brigade."

"And when I do that," cried Kent, almost savagely, "I shall find this place you call the Valley of Silent Men, if it takes me all my life."

It was becoming a joy for him to see the sudden flashes of pleasure that leaped into her eyes. She attempted no concealment. Whatever her emotions were they revealed themselves unaffectedly and with a simple freedom from embarrassment that swept him with an almost reverential worship. And what he had just said pleased her. Unreservedly her glowing eyes and her partly smiling lips told him that, and she said: "I am glad you feel that way, Jeems. And I think you would find it—in time. Because——"

Her little trick of looking at him so steadily, as if there was something inside him which she was trying to see more clearly, made him feel more helplessly than ever her slave. It was as if, in those moments, she forgot that he was of flesh and blood, and was looking into his heart to see what was there before she gave voice to things.

And then she said, still twisting her braid between

her slim fingers, "You would find it—perhaps—because you are one who would not give up easily. Shall I tell you why I came to see you at Doctor Cardigan's? It was curiosity, at first—largely that. Just why or how I was interested in the man you freed is one of the things I can not tell you. And I can not tell you why I came to the Landing. Nor can I say a word about Kedsty. It may be, some day, that you will know. And then you will not like me. For nearly four years before I saw you that day I had been in a desolation. It was a terrible place. It ate my heart and soul out with its ugliness, its loneliness, its emptiness. A little while longer and I would have died. Then the thing happened that brought me away. Can you guess where it was?"

He shook his head, "No."

"To all the others it was a beautiful place, Montreal."

"You were at school there?" he guessed.

"Yes, the Villa Maria. I wasn't quite sixteen then. They were kind. I think they liked me. But each night I prayed one prayer. You know what the Three Rivers are to us, to the people of the North. The Athabasca is Grandmother, the Slave is Mother, the Mackenzie is Daughter, and over them watches always the goddess Niska, the Gray Goose. And my prayer was that I might go back to them. In Montreal there were people, people everywhere, thousands and tens of thousands of them, so many that I was lonely and

heartsick and wanted to get away. For the Gray Goose blood is in me, Jeems. I love the forests. And Niska's God doesn't live in Montreal. Her sun doesn't rise there. Her moon isn't the same there. The flowers are not hers. The winds tell different stories. The air is another air. People, when they look at you, look in another way. Away down the Three Rivers I had loved men. There I was learning to hate them. Then, something happened. I came to Athabasca Landing. I went to see you because——"

She clasped her two hands tightly in her lap. "Because, after those four terrible years, you were the first man I found who was playing a great, big, square game to the end. Don't ask me how I found it out. Please don't ask me anything. I am telling you all you can know, all you *shall* know. But I did find it out. And then I learned that you were not going to die. Kedsty told me that. And when I had talked with you I knew that you would play any game square, and I made up my mind to help you. That is why I am telling you all this—just to let you know that I have faith in you, and that you must not break that faith. You must not insist on knowing more about me. You must still play the game. I am playing mine, and you must play yours. And to play yours clean, you must go with Laselle's brigade and leave me with Kedsty. You must forget what has happened. You must forget what *may* happen. You can not help me. You can only harm me. And if—

some day, a long time from now—you should happen to find the Valley of Silent Men——"

He waited, his heart pounding like a fist.

"I may—be there," she finished, in a voice so low that it was scarcely above a whisper.

It seemed to him that she was looking a long way off, and it was not in his direction. And then she smiled, not at him, but in a half-hopeless little way.

"I think I shall be disappointed if you don't find it," she said then, and her eyes were pure as the blue flowers from which they had stolen their color, as she looked at him. "You know the great Sulphur Country beyond Fort Simpson, westward between the Two Nahannis?"

"Yes. That is where Kilbane and his patrol were lost. The Indians call it the Devil Country. Is that it?"

She nodded. "They say no living thing has ever been through the Sulphur Country," she said. "But that is not true. I have been through it. It is beyond the Sulphur Country you must go to find the Valley of Silent Men, straight through that gap between the North and the South Nahanni. That is the way *you* must go if you should ever find it, Jeems, for otherwise you would have to come down from Dawson or up from Skagway, and the country is so great that you would never come upon it in a thousand years. The police will not find you there. You will always be safe. Perhaps I shall tell you more before the Brigade

comes. But that is all tonight. I may never tell you anything more. And you must not question me."

Speechless he had stood, all the life of his soul burning like a fire in his eyes as he looked at her and listened to her, and now, quietly and unexcitedly, he said:

"Marette, I am going to play this game as you want me to play it, because I love you. It is only honest for me to tell you in words what you must already know. And I am going to fight for you as long as there is a drop of blood in my body. If I go with Jean Laselle's brigade, will you promise me——"

His voice trembled. He was repressing a mighty emotion. But not by the quiver of one of her long lashes did Marette Radisson give evidence that she had even heard his confession of love. She interrupted him before he had finished.

"I can promise you nothing, no matter what you do. Jeems, Jeems, you are not like those other men I learned to hate? You will not *insist?* If you do—if you are like them—yes, you may go away from here tonight and not wait for Jean Laselle. Listen! The storm will not break for hours. If you are going to demand a price for playing the game as I want you to play it, you may go. You have my permission."

She was very white. She rose from the big chair and stood before him. There was no anger in her voice or gesture, but her eyes glowed like luminous stars. There was something in them which he had

not seen before, and suddenly a thought struck his heart cold as ice.

With a low cry he stretched out his hands. "My God, Marette, I am not a murderer! I did not kill John Barkley!"

She did not answer him.

"You don't believe me," he cried. "You believe that I killed Barkley, and that now—a murderer—I dare to tell you that I love you!"

She was trembling. It was like a little shiver running through her. For only a flash it seemed to him that he had caught a glimpse of something terrible, a thing she was hiding, a thing she was fighting as she stood there with her two little clenched hands. For in her face, in her eyes, in the beating throb of her white throat he saw, in that moment, the almost hidden agony of a hurt thing. And then it was gone, even as he entreated again, pleading for her faith.

"I did not kill John Barkley!"

"I am not thinking of that, Jeems," she said. "It is of something——"

They had forgotten the storm. It was howling and beating at the windows outside. But suddenly there came a sound that rose above the monotonous tumult of it, and Marette started as if it had sent an electric shock through her. Kent, too, turned toward the window.

It was the metallic tap, tap, tapping which once before had warned them of approaching danger. And

this time it was insistent. It was as if a voice was crying out to them from beyond the window. It was more than premonition—it was the alarm of a near and impending menace. And in that moment Kent saw Marette Radisson's hands go swiftly to her throat and her eyes leap with sudden fire, and she gave a little cry as she listened to the sound.

CHAPTER XVII

IN ten seconds, it seemed to Kent, Marette Radisson was again the splendid creature who had held the three men at bay over the end of her little black gun at barracks. The sound of Mooie's second warning came at first as a shock. Accompanying it there was a moment of fear, of fear driven almost to the point of actual terror. Following it came a reaction so swift that Kent was dazed. Within those ten seconds the girl's slender body seemed to grow taller; a new light flamed in her face; her eyes, turning swiftly to him, were filled with the same fire with which they had faced the three constables. She was unafraid. She was ready to fight.

In such moments as these it was the quiet and dispassionate composure of her voice that amazed him most. It was musical in its softness now. Yet in that softness was a hidden thing. It was like velvet covering steel. She had spoken of Niska, the Gray Goose, the goddess of the Three Rivers. And he thought that something of the spirit of a goddess must be in Marette Radisson to give her the courage with which she faced him, even as the metallic thing outside tapped its warning again at the window.

"Inspector Kedsty is coming back," she said. "I did not think he would do that—tonight."

"He has not had time to go to barracks," said Kent.

"No. Possibly he has forgotten something. Before he arrives, I want to show you the nest I have made for you, Jeems. Come quickly!"

It was her first intimation that he was not to remain in her room, a possibility that had already caused him some inward embarrassment. She seized a number of matches, turned down her light, and hurried into the hall. Kent followed her to the end of this hall, where she paused before a low half-door that apparently opened into some sort of a space close under the sloping roof of the bungalow.

"It is an old storeroom," she whispered. "I have made it quite comfortable, I think. I have covered the window, so you may light the lamp. But you must see that no light shows under this door. Lock it on the inside, and be very quiet. For whatever you find in there you must thank M'sieu Fingers."

She pulled the door slightly open and gave him the matches. The illumination in the lower hall made its way only dimly to where they stood. In the gloom he found himself close to the soft glow of her eyes. His fingers closed about her hand as he took the matches.

"Marette, you believe me?" he entreated. "You believe that I love you, that I didn't kill John Barkley,

that I am going to fight for you as long as God gives me breath to fight?"

For a moment there was silence. Her hand withdrew gently from his.

"Yes, I think that I believe. Good-night, Jeems."

She went from him quickly. At her door she turned. "Go in now, please," she called back softly. "If you care as you say you do, *go in.*"

She did not wait for his reply. Her own door closed behind her, and Kent, striking a match, stooped low and entered his hiding-place. In a moment he saw directly ahead of him a lamp on a box. He lighted this, and his first movement then was to close the door and turn the key that was in the lock. After that he looked about him.

The storeroom was not more than ten feet square, and the roof was so close over his head that he could not stand upright. It was not the smallness of the place that struck him first, but the preparations which Marette had made for him. In a corner was a bed of blankets, and the rough floor of the place was carpeted with blankets, except for a two-or-three-foot space around the edge of it. Beyond the box was a table and a chair, and it was the burden of this table that made his pulse jump quickest. Marette had not forgotten that he might grow hungry. It was laid sumptuously, with a plate for one, but with food for half a dozen. There were a brace of roasted grouse, brown as nuts; a cold roast of moose meat or beef;

a dish piled high with golden potato salad; olives, pickles, an open can of cherries, a loaf of bread, butter, cheese—and one of Kedsty's treasured thermos bottles, which undoubtedly held hot coffee or tea. And then he noticed what was on the chair—a belt and holster and a Colt automatic forty-five! Marette had not figured on securing a gun in the affair at barracks, and her foresight had not forgotten a weapon. She had placed it conspicuously where he could not fail to see it at once. And just beyond the chair, on the floor, was a shoulder-pack. It was of the regulation service sort, partly filled. Resting against the pack was a Winchester. He recognized the gun. He had seen it hanging in Dirty Fingers' shack.

For a matter of five minutes he scarcely moved from where he stood beside the table. Nothing but an unplastered roof was between him and the storm, and over his head the thunder crashed, and the rain beat in torrents. He saw where the window was, carefully covered with a blanket. Even through the blanket he caught faintly the illumination of lightning. This window overlooked the entrance to Kedsty's bungalow, and the idea came to him of turning out the light and opening it. In darkness he took down the blanket. But the window itself was not movable, and after assuring himself of this fact he flattened his face against it, peering out into the chaos of the night.

In that instant came a flare of lightning, and to Kent, looking down, was revealed a sight that tight-

ened every muscle in his body. More vividly than if it had been day he saw a man standing below in the deluge. It was not Mooie. It was not Kedsty. It was no one that he had ever seen. Even more like a ghost than a man was that apparition of the lightning flare. A great, gaunt giant of a ghost, bareheaded, with long, dripping hair and a long, storm-twisted beard. The picture shot to his brain with the swiftness of the lightning itself. It was like the sudden throwing of a cinema picture on a screen. Then blackness shut it out. Kent stared harder. He waited.

Again came the lightning, and again he saw that tragic, ghost-like figure waiting in the storm. Three times he saw it. And he knew that the mysterious, bearded giant was an old man. The fourth time the lightning came, the figure was gone. And in that flare it was the bowed figure of Kedsty he saw hurrying up the gravel path to the door.

Quickly Kent covered the window, but he did not relight the lamp. Before Kedsty could have reached the foot of the stair, he had unlocked the door. Cautiously he opened it three or four inches and sat down with his back against the wall, listening. He heard Kedsty pass through into the big room where Marette had waited for him a short time before. After that there was silence except for the tumult of the storm.

For an hour Kent listened. In all that time he did not hear a sound from the lower hall or from Marette's room. He wondered if she was sleeping, and if

Kedsty had gone to bed, waiting for morning before he set in action his bloodhounds of the law.

Kent had no intention of disturbing the comfortable looking bed of blankets. He was not only sleepless, but filled with a premonition of events about to happen. He felt impinging itself more and more upon him a sense of watchfulness. That Inspector Kedsty and Marette Radisson were under the same roof, and that there was some potent and mysterious reason which kept Kedsty from betraying the girl's presence, was the thought which troubled him most. He was not developing further the plans for his own escape.

He was thinking of Marette. What was her power over Kedsty? Why was it that Kedsty would like to see her dead? Why was she in his house? Again and again he asked himself the questions and found no answers to them. And yet, even in this purgatory of mystery that environed him, he felt himself happier than he had ever been in his life. For Marette was not four or five hundred miles down the river. She was in the same house with him. And he had told her that he loved her. He was glad that he had been given courage to let her know that. He relighted the lamp, and opened his watch and placed it on the table, where frequently he could look at the time. He wanted to smoke his pipe, but the odor of tobacco, he was sure, would reach Kedsty, unless the Inspector had actually retired into his bedroom for the night.

Half a dozen times he questioned himself as to the

identity of the ghostly apparition he had seen in the lightning flare of the storm. Perhaps it was some one of Finger's strange friends from out of the wilderness, Mooie's partner in watching the bungalow. The picture of that giant of a man with his great beard and long hair, as his eyes had caught him in a sea of electrical fire, was indelibly burned into his brain. It was a tragic picture.

Again he put out the light and bared the blanketed window, but he saw nothing but the sodden gleam of the earth when the lightning flashed. A second time he opened the door a few inches and sat down with his back to the wall, listening.

How long it was before drowsiness stole upon him he did not know, but it came, and for a few moments at a time, as his eyes closed, it robbed him of his caution. And then, for a space, he slept. A sound brought him suddenly into wide wakefulness. His first impression was that the sound had been a cry. For a moment or two, as his senses adjusted themselves, he was not sure. Then swiftly the thing grew upon him.

He rose to his feet and widened the crack of his door. A bar of light shot across the upper hall. It was from Marette's room. He had taken off his boots to deaden the sound of his feet, and he stepped outside his door. He was positive he heard a low cry, a choking, sobbing cry, only barely audible, and that it came from down the stair.

No longer hesitating, he moved quickly to Marette's

room and looked in. His first glimpse was of the bed. It had not been used. The room was empty.

Something cold and chilling gripped at his heart, and an impulse which he no longer made an effort to resist pulled him to the head of the stair. It was more than an impulse—it was a demand. Step by step he went down, his hand on the butt of his Colt.

He reached the lower hall, which was still lighted, and a step or two brought him to a view of the door that opened into the big living-room beyond. That door was partly open, and the room itself was filled with light. Soundlessly Kent approached. He looked in.

What he saw first brought him relief together with shock. At one end of the long desk table over which hung a great brass lamp stood Marette. She was in profile to him. He could not see her face. Her hair fell loose about her, glowing like a rich, sable cape in the light of the lamp. She was safe, alive, and yet the attitude of her as she looked down was the thing that gave him shock. He was compelled to move a few inches more before he could see what she was staring at. And then his heart stopped dead still.

Huddled down in his chair, with his head flung back so that the terrible ghastliness of his face fronted Kent, was Kedsty. And Kent, in an instant, knew. Only a dead man could look like that.

With a cry he entered the room. Marette did not start, but an answering cry came into her throat as she

turned her eyes from Kedsty to him. To Kent it was like looking upon the dead in two ways. Marette Radisson, living and breathing, was whiter than Kedsty, who was white with the unbreathing pallor of the actually dead. She did not speak. She made no sound after that answering cry in her throat. She simply looked. And Kent spoke her name gently as he saw her great, wide eyes blazing dully their agony and despair. Then, like one stunned and fascinated, she stared down upon Kedsty again.

Every instinct of the man-hunter became alive in Kent's brain as he, too, turned toward the Inspector of Police. Kedsty's arms hung limp over the side of his chair. On the floor under his right hand was his Colt automatic. His head was strained so far over the back of the chair that it looked as though his neck had been broken. On his forehead, close up against his short-cropped, iron-gray hair, was a red stain.

Kent approached and bent over him. He had seen death too many times not to recognize it now, but seldom had he seen a face twisted and distorted as Kedsty's was. His eyes were open and bulging in a glassy stare. His jaws hung loose. His——

It was then Kent's blood froze in his veins. Kedsty had received a blow, but it was not the blow that had killed him. Afterward he had been choked to death. And the thing that had choked him was *a tress of woman's hair.*

In the seconds that followed that discovery Kent

could not have moved if his own life had paid the penalty of inaction. For the story was told—there about Kedsty's throat and on his chest. The tress of hair was long and soft and shining and black. It was twisted twice around Kedsty's neck, and the loose end rippled down over his shoulder, *glowing like a bit of rich sable in the lamplight.* It was that thought of velvety sable that had come to him at the doorway, looking at Marette. It was the thought that came to him now. He touched it; he took it in his fingers; he unwound it from about Kedsty's neck, where it had made two deep rings in the flesh. From his fingers it rippled out full length. And he turned slowly and faced Marette Radisson.

Never had human eyes looked at him as she was looking at him now. She reached out a hand, her lips mute, and Kent gave her the tress of hair. And the next instant she turned, with a hand clasped at her own throat, and passed through the door.

After that he heard her going unsteadily up the stairs.

CHAPTER XVIII

KENT did not move. His senses for a space were stunned. He was almost physically insensible to all emotions but that one of shock and horror. He was staring at Kedsty's gray-white, twisted face when he heard Marette's door close. A cry came from his lips, but he did not hear it—was unconscious that he had made a sound. His body shook with a sudden tremor. He could not disbelieve, for the evidence was there. From behind, as he had sat in his chair, Marette Radisson had struck the Inspector of Police with some blunt object. The blow had stunned him. And after that——

He drew a hand across his eyes, as if to clear his vision. What he had seen was impossible. The evidence was impossible. Assaulted, in deadly peril, defending either honor or love, Marette Radisson was of the blood to kill. But to creep up behind her victim —it was inconceivable! Yet there had been no struggle. Even the automatic on the floor gave no evidence of that. Kent picked it up. He looked at it closely, and again the unconscious cry of despair came in a half groan from his lips. For on the butt of the Colt was a stain of blood and a few gray hairs. Kedsty had been stunned by a blow from his own gun!

As Kent placed it on the table, his eyes caught suddenly a gleam of steel under the edge of a newspaper, and he drew out from their hiding-place the long-bladed clipping scissors which Kedsty had used in the preparation of his scrap-books and official reports. It was the last link in the deadly evidence—the automatic with its telltale stain, the scissors, the tress of hair, and Marette Radisson. He felt a sensation of sudden dizziness. Every nerve-center in his body had received its shock, and when the shock had passed it left him sweating.

Swiftly the reaction came. It was a lie, he told himself. The evidence was false. Marette could not have committed that crime, as the crime had visualized itself before his eyes. There was something which he had not seen, something which he could not see, something that was hiding itself from him. He became, in an instant, the old James Kent. The instinctive processes of the man-hunter leaped to their stations like trained soldiers. He saw Marette again, as she had looked at him when he entered the room. It was not murder he had caught in her wide-open eyes. It was not hatred. It was not madness. It was a quivering, bleeding soul crying out to him in an agony that no other human eyes had ever revealed to him before. And suddenly a great voice cried out in his brain, drowning all other things, telling him how contemptible a thing was love unless in that love was faith.

With his heart choking him, he turned again to Ked

sty. The futility of the thing which he had told himself was faith gripped at him sickeningly, yet he fought for that faith, even as his eyes looked again upon the ghastly torture that was in Kedsty's face.

He was becoming calmer. He touched the dead man's cheek and found that it was no longer warm. The tragedy must have occurred an hour before. He examined more closely the abrasion on Kedsty's forehead. It was not a deep wound, and the blow that had made it must have stunned the Inspector of Police for only a short time. In that space the other thing had happened. In spite of his almost superhuman effort to keep the picture away from him, Kent saw it vividly—the swift turning to the table, the inspiration of the scissors, the clipping of the long tress of hair, the choking to death of Kedsty as he regained consciousness. Over and over again he whispered to himself the impossibility of it, the absurdity of it, the utter incongruity of it. Only a brain gone mad would have conceived that monstrous way of killing Kedsty. And Marette was not mad. She was sane.

Like the eyes of a hunting ferret his own eyes swept quickly about the room. At the four windows there were long curtain cords. On the walls, hung there as trophies, were a number of weapons. On one end of Kedsty's desk, used as a paperweight, was a stone tomahawk. Still nearer to the dead man's hands, unhidden by papers, was a boot-lace. Under his limp right hand was the automatic. With these possible in-

struments of death close at hand, ready to be snatched up without trouble or waste of time, why had the murderer used a tress of woman's hair?

The boot-lace drew Kent's eyes. It was impossible not to see it, forty-eight inches long and quarter-inch-wide buckskin. He began seeking for its mate, and found it on the floor where Marette Radisson had been standing. And again the unanswerable question pounded in Kent's brain—why had Kedsty's murderer used a tress of hair instead of a buckskin lace or one of the curtain cords hanging conspicuously at the windows?

He went to each of these windows and found them locked. Then, a last time, he bent over Kedsty. He knew that in the final moments of his life Kedsty had suffered a slow and torturing agony. His twisted face left the story. And the Inspector of Police was a powerful man. He had struggled, still partly dazed by the blow. But it had taken strength to overcome him even then, to hold his head back, to choke life out of him slowly with the noose of hair. And Kent, now that the significance of what he saw began to grow upon him more clearly, felt triumphing over all other things in his soul a slow and mighty joy. It was inconceivable that with the strength of her own hands and body Marette Radisson had killed Kedsty. A greater strength than hers had held him in the death-chair, and a greater strength than hers had choked life from the Inspector of Police!

He drew slowly out of the room, closing the door noiselessly behind him. He found that the front door was as Kedsty had left it, unlocked.

Close to that door he stood for a space, scarcely allowing himself to breathe. He listened, but no sound came down the dimly illumined stairway.

A new thing was pressing upon him now. It rode over the shock of tragedy, over the first-roused instincts of the man-hunter, overwhelming him with the realization of a horror such as had never confronted him before. It gripped him more fiercely than the mere killing of Kedsty. His thought was of Marette, of the fate which dawn and discovery would bring for her. His hands clenched and his jaws tightened. The world was against him, and tomorrow it would be against her. Only he, in the face of all that condemning evidence in the room beyond, would disbelieve her guilty of Kedsty's death. And he, Jim Kent, was already a murderer in the eyes of the law.

He felt within him the slow-growing inspiration of a new spirit, the gathering might of a new force. A few hours ago he was an outcast. He was condemned. Life, for him, had been robbed of its last hope. And in that hour of his grimmest despair Marette Radisson had come to him. Through storm that had rocked the earth under her feet and set ablaze the chaotic blackness of the sky over her head she had struggled—for him. She had counted no cost. She had measured no chances. She had simply come—*because she*

believed in him. And now, upstairs, she was the victim of the terrible price that was the first cost of his freedom. For he believed, now that the thought came to him like a dagger stroke, that this was so. Her act in freeing him had brought about the final climax, and as a result of it, Kedsty was dead.

He went to the foot of the stair. Quietly, in his shoeless feet, he began to climb them. He wanted to cry out Marette's name even before he came to the top. He wanted to reach up to her with his arms outstretched. But he came silently to her door and looked in.

She lay in a crumpled, huddled heap on her bed. Her face was hidden, and all about her lay her smothering hair. For a moment he was frightened. He could not see that she was breathing. So still was she that she was like one dead.

His footsteps were unheard as he moved across the room. He knelt down beside her, reached out his arms, and gathered her into them.

"Marette!" he cried in a low voice.

He felt the sudden quiver, like a little shock, that ran through her. He crushed his face down, so that it lay in her hair, still damp from its wetting. He drew her closer, tightening his arms about her slender body, and a little cry came from her—a cry that was a broken thing, a sob without tears.

"Marette!"

It was all he said. It was all he could say in that

moment when his heart was beating like a drum against her breast. And then he felt the slow pressure of her hands against him, saw her white face, her wide, staring eyes within a few inches of his own, and she drew away from him, back against the wall, still huddled like a child on the bed, with her eyes fixed on him in a way that frightened him. There were no tears in them. She had not been crying. But her face was as white as he had seen it down in Kedsty's room. Some of the horror and shock had gone out of it. In it was another look as her eyes glowed upon Kent. It was a look of incredulity, of disbelief, a thing slowly fading away under the miracle of an amazing revelation. The truth thrust itself upon him.

Marette had not expected that he would come to her like this. She had believed that he would take flight into the night, escaping from her as he would have run from a plague. She put up her two hands, in the trick they had of groping at her white throat, and her lips formed a word which she did not speak.

Kent, to his own amazement, was smiling and still on his knees. He pulled himself to his feet, and stood up straight, looking down at her in that same strange, comforting, all-powerful way. The thrill of it was passing into her veins. A flush of color was driving the deathly pallor from her face. Her lips were parted, and she breathed quickly, a little excitedly.

"I thought—you would go!" she said.

"Not without you," he said. "I have come to take you with me."

He drew out his watch. It was two o'clock. He held it down so that she could look at the dial.

"If the storm keeps up, we have three hours before dawn," he said. "How soon can you be ready, Marette?"

He was fighting to make his voice quiet and unexcited. It was a terrific struggle. And Marette was not blind to it. She drew herself from the bed and stood up before him, her two hands still clasped at her throbbing throat.

"You believe—that I killed Kedsty," she said in a voice that was forced from her lips. "And you have come to help me—to pay me for what I tried to do for you? That is it—Jeems?"

"Pay you?" he cried. "I couldn't pay you in a million years! From that day you first came to Cardigan's place you gave me life. You came when the last spark of hope in me had died. I shall always believe that I would have died that night. But you saved me.

"From the moment I saw you I loved you, and I believe it was that love that kept me alive. And then you came to me again, down there, through this storm. Pay you! I can't. I never shall be able to. Because you thought I had killed a man made no difference. You came just the same. And you came ready to kill. if necessary—for me. I'm not trying to tell myself *why!* But you did. You were ready to kill. And I

am ready to kill—tonight—for you! I haven't got time to think about Kedsty. I'm thinking about you. If you killed him, I'm just telling myself there was a mighty good reason for it. But I don't believe it was you who killed him. You couldn't do it—with those hands!"

He reached out suddenly and seized them, slipping his grip to her wrists, so that her hands lay upward in his own, hands that were small, slim-fingered, soft-palmed, beautiful.

"They couldn't!" he cried, almost fiercely. "I swear to God they couldn't!"

Her eyes and face flamed at his words. "You believe that, Jeems?"

"Yes, just as you believe that I did not kill John Barkley. But the world is against us. It is against us both now. And we've got to hunt that hidden valley of yours together. Understand, Marette? And I'm—rather glad."

He turned toward the door. "Will you be ready in ten minutes?" he asked.

She nodded. "Yes, in ten minutes."

He ran out into the hall and down the stair, locking the front door. Then he returned to his hiding-place under the roof. He knew that a strange sort of madness was in his blood, for in the face of tonight's tragedy only madness could inspire him with the ecstatic thrill that was in his veins. Kedsty's death seemed far removed from a more important thing—

the fact that from this hour Marette was his to fight for, that she belonged to him, that she must go with him. He loved her. In spite of whoever she was and whatever she had done, he loved her. Very soon she would tell him what had happened in the room below, and the thing would be clear.

There was one little corner of his brain that fought him. It kept telling him, like a parrot, that it was a tress of Marette's hair about Kedsty's throat, and that it was the hair that had choked him. But Marette would explain that, too. He was sure of it. In the face of the facts below he was illogical and unreasonable. He knew it. But his love for this girl, who had come strangely and tragically into his life, was like an intoxicant. And his faith was illimitable. She did not kill Kedsty. Another part of his brain kept repeating that over and over, even as he recalled that only a few hours before she had told him quite calmly that she would kill the Inspector of Police—if a certain thing should happen.

His hands worked as swiftly as his thoughts. He laced up his service boots. All the food and dishes on the table he made into a compact bundle and placed in the shoulder-pack. He carried this and the rifle out into the hall. Then he returned to Marette's room. The door was closed. At his knock the girl's voice told him that she was not quite ready.

He waited. He could hear her moving about quickly in her room. An interval of silence followed. An-

other five minutes passed—ten—fifteen. He tapped at the door again. This time it was opened.

He stared, amazed at the change in Marette. She had stepped back from the door to let him enter, and stood full in the lamp-glow. Her slim, beautiful body was dressed in a velvety blue corduroy; the coat was close-fitting and boyish; the skirt came only a little below her knees. On her feet were high-topped caribou boots. About her waist was a holster and the little black gun. Her hair was done up and crowded under a close-fitting turban. She was exquisitely lovely, as she stood there waiting for him, and in that loveliness Kent saw there was not one thing out of place. The corduroy, the turban, the short skirt, and the high, laced boots were made for the wilderness. She was not a tenderfoot. She was a little *sourdough*—clear through! Gladness leaped into Kent's face. But it was not the transformation of her dress alone that amazed him. She was changed in another way. Her cheeks were flushed. Her eyes glowed with a strange and wonderful radiance as she looked at him. Her lips were red, as he had seen them that first time at Cardigan's place. Her pallor, her fear, her horror were gone, and in their place was the repressed excitement of one about to enter upon a strange adventure.

On the floor was a pack only half as large as Kent's and when he picked it up, he found it of almost no weight. He fastened it to his own pack while Marette put on her raincoat and went down the stair ahead

of him. In the hall below she was waiting, when he came down, with Kedsty's big rubber slicker in her hands.

"You must put it on," she said.

She shuddered slightly as she held the garment. The color was almost gone from her cheeks, as she faced the door beyond which the dead man sat in his chair, but the marvelous glow was still in her eyes as she helped Kent with his pack and the slicker and afterward stood for an instant with her hands touching his breast and her lips as if about to speak something which she held back.

A few steps beyond them they heard the storm. It seemed to rush upon the bungalow in a new fury, beating at the door, crashing over their heads in thunder, daring them to come out. Kent reached up and turned out the hall light.

In darkness he opened the door. Rain and wind swept in. With his free hand he groped out, found Marette, drew her after him, and closed the door again. Entering from the lighted hall into the storm was like being swallowed in a pit of blackness. It engulfed and smothered them. Then came suddenly a flash of lightning, and he saw Marette's face, white and drenched, but looking at him with that same strange glow in her eyes. It thrilled him. Even in the darkness it was there. It had been there since he had returned to her from Kedsty and had knelt at her bedside, with his arms about her for a moment.

Only now, in the beat of the storm, did an answer to the miracle of it come to him. It was because of *him*. It was because of his *faith* in her. Even death and horror could not keep it from her eyes. He wanted to cry out the joy of his discovery, to give wild voice to it in the teeth of the wind and the rain. He felt sweeping through him a force mightier than that of the night. Her hands were on his arm, as if she was afraid of losing him in that pit of blackness; the soft cling of them was like a contact through which came a warm thrill of electrical life. He put out his arm and drew her to him, so that for a moment his face pressed against the top of her wet little turban.

And then he heard her say: "There is a scow at the bayou, Jeems. It is close to the end of the path. M'sieu Fingers has kept it there, waiting, ready."

He had been thinking of Crossen's place and an open boat. He blessed Fingers again, as he took Marette's hand in his own and started for the trail that led through the poplar thicket.

Their feet slopped deep in wet and mud, and with the rain there was a wind that took their breath away. It was impossible to see a tree an arm's length away, and Kent hoped that the lightning would come frequently enough to guide him. In the first flare of it he looked down the slope that led riverward. Little rivulets of water were running down it. Rocks and stumps were in their way, and underfoot it was slippery. Marette's fingers were clinging to his again,

as she had held to them on the wild race up to Kedsty's bungalow from the barracks. He had tingled then in the sheer joy of their thrill, but it was a different thrill that stirred him now—an overwhelming emotion of possessorship. This night, with its storm and its blackness, was the most wonderful of all his nights.

He sensed nothing of its discomfort. It could not beat back the joyous racing of the blood in his body. Sun and stars, day and night, sunshine and cloud, were trivial and inconsequential to him now. For close to him, struggling with him, fighting through the night with him, trusting him, helpless without him, was the living, breathing thing he loved more than he loved his own life. For many years, without knowing it, he had waited for this night, and now that it was upon him, it inundated and swept away his old life. He was no longer the huntsman, but the hunted. He was no longer alone, but had a priceless thing to fight for, a priceless and helpless thing that was clinging to his fingers in the darkness. He did not feel like a fugitive, but as one who has come into a great triumph. He sensed no uncertainty or doubt.

The river lay ahead, and for him the river had become the soul and the promise of life. It was Marette's river and his river, and in a little while they would be on it. And Marette would then tell him about Kedsty. He was sure of that. She would tell him what had happened while he slept. His faith was illimitable.

They came into the sodden dip at the foot of the ridge, and the lightning revealed to him the edge of the poplar growth in which O'Connor had seen Marette many weeks ago. The bayou trail wound through this, and Kent struck out for it blindly in the darkness. He did not try to talk, but he freed his companion's hand and put his arm about her when they came to the level ground, so that she was sheltered by him from the beat of the storm. Then brush swished in their faces, and they stopped, waiting for the lightning again. Kent was not anxious for it to come. He drew the girl still closer, and in that pit of blackness, with the deluge about her and the crash of thunder over her head, she snuggled up against his breast, the throb of her body against him, waiting, watching, with him. Her frailty, the helplessness of her, the slimness of her in the crook of his arm, filled him with an exquisite exultation. He did not think of her now as the splendid, fearless creature who had leveled her little black gun at the three men in barracks. She was no longer the mysterious, defiant, unafraid person who had held him in a sort of awe that first hour in Kedsty's place. For she was crumpled against him now, utterly dependent and afraid. In that chaos of storm something told him that her nerve was broken, that without him she would be lost and would cry out in fear. *And he was glad!* He held her tighter; he bent his head until his face touched the wet, crushed hair under the edge

of her turban. And then the lightning split open the night again, and he saw the way ahead of him to the trail.

Even in darkness it was not difficult to follow in the clean-cut wagon path. Over their heads the tops of the poplars swished and wailed. Under their feet the roadway in places was a running stream or inundated until it became a pool. In pitch blackness they struck such a pool, and in spite of the handicap of his packs and rifle Kent stopped suddenly, and picked Marette up in his arms, and carried her until they reached high ground. He did not ask permission. And Marette, for a minute or two, lay crumpled up close in his arms, and for a thrilling instant his face touched her rain-wet cheek.

The miracle of their adventure was that neither spoke. To Kent the silence between them had become a thing which he had no desire to break. In that silence, excused and abetted by the tumult of the storm, he felt that a wonderful something was drawing them closer and closer together, and that words might spoil the indescribable magic of the thing that was happening. When he set Marette on her feet again, her hand accidentally fell upon his, and for a moment her fingers closed upon it in a soft pressure that meant more to him than a thousand words of gratitude.

A quarter of a mile beyond the poplar thicket they came to the edge of the spruce and cedar timber, and soon the thick walls of the forest shut them in, shel-

tering them from the wind, but the blackness was even more like that of a bottomless pit. Kent had noticed that the thunder and lightning were drifting steadily eastward, and now the occasional flashes of electrical fire scarcely illumined the trail ahead of them. The rain was not beating so fiercely. They could hear the wail of the spruce and cedar tops and the slush of their boots in mud and water. An interval came, where the spruce-tops met overhead, when it was almost calm. It was then that Kent threw out of him a great, deep breath and laughed joyously and exultantly.

"Are you wet, little Gray Goose?"

"Only outside, Big Otter. My feathers have kept me dry."

Her voice had a trembling, half-sobbing, half-rejoicing note in it. It was not the voice of one who had recently killed a man. In it was a pathos which Kent knew she was trying to hide behind brave words. Her hands clung to the arm of his rubber slicker even as they stood there, close together, as if she was afraid something might drag them apart in that treacherous gloom. Kent, fumbling for a moment, drew from an inner pocket a dry handkerchief. Then he found her face, tilted it a bit upward, and wiped it dry. He might have done the same thing to a child who had been crying. After that he scrubbed his own, and they went on, his arm about her again.

It was half a mile from the edge of the forest to

the bayou, and half a dozen times in that distance Kent took the girl in his arms and carried her through water that almost reached his boot tops. The lightning no longer served them. The rain still fell steadily, but the wind had gone with the eastward sweep of the storm. Close-hung with the forest walls, the bayou itself was indiscernible in the blackness. Marette guided him now, though Kent walked ahead of her, holding firmly to her hand. Unless Fingers had changed its location, the scow should be somewhere within forty or fifty paces of the end of the trail. It was small, a two-man scow, with a tight little house built amidships. And it was tied close up against the shore. Marette told him this as they felt their way through brush and reeds. Then he stumbled against something taut and knee-high, and he found it was the tie-rope.

Leaving Marette with her back to the anchor tree, he went aboard. The water was three or four inches deep in the bottom of the scow, but the cabin was built on a platform raised above the floor of the boat, and Kent hoped it was still dry. He groped until he found the twisted wire which held the door shut. Opening it, he ducked his head low and entered. The little room was not more than four feet high, and for greater convenience he fell upon his knees while fumbling under his slicker for his water-proof box of matches. The water had not yet risen above the floor.

The first light he struck revealed the interior to him.

It was a tiny cabin, scarcely larger than some boxes he had seen. It was about eight feet long by six in width, and the ceiling was so low that, even kneeling, his head touched it. His match burned out, and he lighted another. This time he saw a candle stuck in a bit of split birch that projected from the wall. He crept to it and lighted it. For a moment he looked about him, and again he blessed Fingers. The little scow was prepared for a voyage. Two narrow bunks were built at the far end, one so close above the other that Kent grinned as he thought of squeezing between. There were blankets. Within reach of his arm was a tiny stove, and close to the stove a supply of kindling and dry wood. The whole thing made him think of a child's playhouse. Yet there was still room for a wide, comfortable, cane-bottomed chair, a stool, and a smooth-planed board fastened under a window, so that it answered the purpose of a table. This table was piled with many packages.

He stripped off his packs and returned for Marette. She had come to the edge of the scow and called to him softly as she heard him splashing through the water. Her arms were reaching toward him, to meet him in the darkness. He carried her through the shallow sea about his feet and laughed as he put her down on the edge of the platform at the door. It was a low, joyous laugh. The yellow light of the candle sputtered in their wet faces. Only dimly could he see her, but her eyes were shining.

"Your nest, little Gray Goose," he cried gently.

Her hand reached up and touched his face. "You have been good to me, Jeems," she said, a little tremble in her voice. "You may—kiss me."

Out in the beat of the rain Kent's heart choked him with song. His soul swelled with the desire to shout forth a pæan of joy and triumph at the world he was leaving this night for all time. With the warm thrill of Marette's lips he had become the superman, and as he leaped ashore in the darkness and cut the tie-rope with a single slash of his knife, he wanted to give voice to the thing that was in him as the rivermen had chanted in the glory of their freedom the day the big brigade started north. And he *did* sing, under his laughing, sobbing breath. With a giant's strength he sent the scow out into the bayou, and then back and forth he swung the long one-man sweep, twisting the craft riverward with the force of two pairs of arms instead of one. Behind the closed door of the tiny cabin was all that the world now held worth fighting for. By turning his head he could see the faint illumination of the candle at the window. The light—the cabin—Marette!

He laughed inanely, foolishly, like a boy. He began to hear a dull, droning murmur, a sound that with each stroke of the sweep grew into a more distinct, cataract-like roar. It was the river. Swollen by flood, it was a terrifying sound. But Kent did not dread it. It was *his* river; it was his friend. It was the pulse

and throb of life to him now. The growing tumult of it was not menace, but the joyous thunder of many voices calling to him, rejoicing at his coming. It grew in his ears. Over his head the black sky opened again, and a deluge of rain fell straight down. But above the sound of it the rush of the river drew nearer, and still nearer. He felt the first eddying swirl of it against the scow head, and powerful hands seemed to reach in out of the darkness. He knew that the nose of the current had caught him and was carrying him out on the breast of the stream. He shipped the sweep and straightened himself, facing the utter chaos of blackness ahead. He felt under him the slow and mighty pulse of the great flood as it swept toward the Slave, the Mackenzie, and the Arctic. And he cried out at last in the downpour of storm, a cry of joy, of exultation, of hope that reached beyond the laws of men—and then he turned toward the little cabin, where through the thickness of sodden night the tiny window was glowing yellow with candle-light.

CHAPTER XIX

TO the cabin Kent groped his way, and knocked, and it was Marette who opened the door for him and stepped back for him to enter. Like a great wet dog he came in, doubling until his hands almost touched the floor. He sensed the incongruity of it, the misplacement of his overgrown body in this playhouse thing, and he grinned through the trickles of wet that ran down his face, and tried to see. Marette had taken off her turban and rain-coat, and she, too, stooped low in the four-feet space of the cabin—but not so ridiculously low as Kent. He dropped on his knees again. And then he saw that in the tiny stove a fire was burning. The crackle of it rose above the beat of the rain on the roof, and the air was already mellowing with the warmth of it. He looked at Marette. Her wet hair was still clinging to her face, her feet and arms and part of her body were wet; but her eyes were shining, and she was smiling at him. She seemed to him, in this moment, like a child that was glad it had found refuge. He had thought that the terror of the night would show in her face, but it was gone. She was not thinking of the thunder and the lightning, the black trail, or of Kedsty lying dead in his bungalow. She was thinking of him.

He laughed outright. It was a joyous, thrilling thing, this black night with the storm over their heads and the roll of the great river under them—they two—alone—in this cockleshell cabin that was not high enough to stand in and scarcely big enough in any direction to turn round in. The snug cheer of it, the warmth of the fire beginning to reach their chilled bodies, and the inspiring crackle of the birch in the little stove filled Kent, for a space, with other thoughts than those of the world they were leaving. And Marette, whose eyes and lips were smiling at him softly in the candle-glow, seemed also to have forgotten. It was the little window that brought them back to the tragedy of their flight. Kent visioned it as it must look from the shore—a telltale blotch of light traveling through the darkness. There were occasional cabins for several miles below the Landing, and eyes turned riverward in the storm might see it. He made his way to the window and fastened his slicker over it.

"We're off, Gray Goose," he said then, rubbing his hands. "Would it seem more homelike if I smoked?"

She nodded, her eyes on the slicker at the window.

"It's pretty safe," said Kent, fishing out his pipe, and beginning to fill it. "Everybody asleep, probably. But we won't take any chances." The scow was swinging sideways in the current. Kent felt the change in its movement, and added: "No danger of being wrecked, either. There isn't a rock or rapids for

thirty miles. River clear as a floor. If we bump ashore, don't get frightened."

"I'm not afraid—of the river," she said. Then, with rather startling unexpectedness, she asked him, "Where will they look for us tomorrow?"

Kent lighted his pipe, eyeing her a bit speculatively as she seated herself on the stool, leaning toward him as she waited for an answer to her question.

"The woods, the river, everywhere," he said. "They'll look for a missing boat, of course. We've simply got to watch behind us and take advantage of a good start."

"Will the rain wipe out our footprints, Jeems?"

"Yes. Everything in the open."

"But—perhaps—in a sheltered place——?"

"We were in no sheltered place," he assured her. "Can you remember that we were, Gray Goose?"

She shook her head slowly. "No. But there was Mooie, under the window."

"His footprints will be wiped out."

"I am glad. I would not have him, or M'sieu Fingers, or any of our friends brought into this trouble."

She made no effort to hide the relief his words brought her. He was a little amazed that she should worry over Fingers and the old Indian in this hour of their own peril. That danger he had decided to keep as far from her mind as possible. But she could not help realizing the impending menace of it. She must know that within a few hours Kedsty would be

found, and the long arm of the wilderness police would begin its work. And if it caught them——

She had thrust her feet toward him and was wriggling them inside her boots, so that he heard the slushing sound of water. "Ugh, but they are wet!" she shivered. "Will you unlace them and pull them off for me, Jeems?"

He laid his pipe aside and knelt close to her. It took him five minutes to get the boots off. Then he held one of her sodden little feet close between his two big hands.

"Cold—cold as ice," he said. "You must take off your stockings, Marette. Please."

He arranged a pile of wood in front of the stove and covered it with a blanket which he pulled from one of the bunks. Then, still on his knees, he drew the cane chair close to the fire and covered it with a second blanket. A few moments later Marette was tucked comfortably in this chair, with her bare feet on the blanketed pile of wood. Kent opened the stove door. Then he extinguished one of the smoking candles, and after that, the other. The flaming birch illumined the little cabin with a mellower light. It gave a subdued flush to the girl's face. Her eyes seemed to Kent wonderfully soft and beautiful in that changed light. And when he had finished, she reached out a hand, and for an instant it touched his face and his wet hair so lightly that he sensed the thrilling caress of it without feeling its weight.

"You are so good to me, Jeems," she said, and he thought there was a little choking note in her throat.

He had seated himself on the floor, close to her chair, with his back to the wall. "It is because I love you, Gray Goose," he replied quietly, looking straight into the fire.

She was silent. She, too, was looking into the fire. Close over their heads they heard the beating of the rain, like a thousand soft little fists pounding the top of the cabin. Under them they could feel the slow swinging of the scow as it responded to the twists and vagaries of the current that was carrying them on. And Kent, unseen by the girl who was looking away from him, raised his eyes. The birch light was glowing in her hair; it trembled on her white throat; her long lashes were caught in the shimmer of it. And, looking at her, Kent thought of Kedsty lying back in his bungalow room, choked to death by a tress of that glorious hair, so near to him now that, by leaning a little forward, he might have touched it with his lips. The thought brought him no horror. For even as he looked, one of her hands crept up to her cheek —the small, soft hand that had touched his face and hair as lightly as a bit of thistle-down—and he knew that two hands like that could not have killed a man who was fighting for life when he died.

And Kent reached up, and took the hand, and held it close in his own, as he said, "Little Gray Goose, please tell me now—what happened in Kedsty's room?"

His voice thrilled with an immeasurable faith. He wanted her to know, no matter what had happened, that this faith and his love for her could not be shaken. He believed in her, and would always believe in her.

Already he was sure that he knew how Kedsty had died. The picture of the tragedy had pieced itself together in his mind, bit by bit. While he slept, Marette and a man were down in the big room with the Inspector of Police. The climax had come, and Kedsty was struck a blow—in some unaccountable way—with his own gun. Then, just as Kedsty was recovering sufficiently from the shock of the blow to fight, Marette's companion had killed him. Horrified, dazed by what had already happened, perhaps unconscious, she had been powerless to prevent the use of a tress of her hair in the murderer's final work. Kent, in this picture, eliminated the boot-laces and the curtain cords. He knew that the unusual and the least expected happened frequently in crime. And Marette's long hair was flowing loose about her. To use it had simply been the first inspiration of the murderer. And Kent believed, as he waited for her answer now, that Marette would tell him this.

And as he waited, he felt her fingers tighten in his hand.

"Tell me, Gray Goose—what happened?"

"I—don't—know—Jeems——"

His eyes went to her suddenly from the fire, as if he was not quite sure he had heard what she had said.

She did not move her head, but continued to gaze unseeingly into the flames. Inside his palm her fingers worked to his thumb and held it tightly again, as they had clung to it when she was frightened by the thunder and lightning.

"I don't know what happened, Jeems."

This time he did not feel the clinging thrill of her little fingers and soft palm. Deep within him he experienced something that was like a sudden and unexpected blow. He was ready to fight for her until his last breath was gone. He was ready to believe anything she told him—anything except this impossible thing which she had just spoken. For she did know what had happened in Kedsty's room. She knew —unless——

Suddenly his heart leaped with joyous hope. "You mean—you were unconscious?" he cried in a low voice that trembled with his eagerness. "You fainted—and it happened then?"

She shook her head. "No. I was asleep in my room. I didn't intend to sleep, but—I did. Something awakened me. I thought I had been dreaming. But something kept pulling me, pulling me downstairs. And when I went, I found Kedsty like that. He was dead. I was paralyzed, standing there, when you came."

She drew her hand away from him, gently, but significantly. "I know you can't believe me, Jeems. It is impossible for you to believe me."

"And you don't want me to believe you, Marette."

"Yes—I do. You must believe me."

"But the tress of hair—your hair—round Kedsty's neck——"

He stopped. His words, spoken gently as they were, seemed brutal to him. Yet he could not see that they affected her. She did not flinch. He saw no tremor of horror. Steadily she continued to look into the fire. And his brain grew confused. Never in all his experience had he seen such absolute and unaffected self-control. And somehow, it chilled him. It chilled him even as he wanted to reach out and gather her close in his arms, and pour his love into her ears, entreating her to tell him everything, to keep nothing back from him that might help in the fight he was going to make.

And then she said, "Jeems, if we should be caught by the Police—it would probably be quite soon, wouldn't it?"

"They won't catch us."

"But our greatest danger of being caught is right now, isn't it?" she insisted.

Kent took out his watch and leaned over to look at it in the fireglow. "It is three o'clock," he said. "Give me another day and night, Gray Goose, and the Police will never find us."

For a moment or two more she was silent. Then her hand reached out, and her fingers twined softly round his thumb again. "Jeems—when we are safe—

when we are sure the Police won't find us—I will tell you all that I know—about what happened in Kedsty's room. And I will tell you—about—the hair. I will tell you—everything." Her fingers tightened almost fiercely. "Everything," she repeated. "I will tell you about that in Kedsty's room—and I will tell you about myself—and after that—I am afraid—you won't like me."

"I love you," he said, making no movement to touch her. "No matter what you tell me, Gray Goose, I shall love you."

She gave a little cry, scarcely more than a broken note in her throat, and Kent—had her face been turned toward him then—would have seen the glory that came into it, and into her eyes, like a swift flash of light—and passed as swiftly away.

What he did see, when she turned her head, were eyes caught suddenly by something at the cabin door. He looked. Water was trickling in slowly over the sill.

"I expected that," he said cheerfully. "Our scow is turning into a rain-barrel, Marette. Unless I bail out, we'll soon be flooded."

He reached for his slicker and put it on. "It won't take me long to throw the water overboard," he added. "And while I'm doing that I want you to take *off* your wet things and tuck yourself into bed. Will you, Gray Goose?"

"I'm not tired, but if you think it is best——" Her hand touched his arm.

"It is best," he said, and for a moment he bent over her until his lips touched her hair.

Then he seized a pail, and went out into the rain.

CHAPTER XX

IT was that hour when, with clear skies, the gray northern dawn would have been breaking faintly over the eastern forests. Kent found the darkness more fog-like; about him was a grayer, ghostlier sort of gloom. But he could not see the water under his feet. Nor could he see the rail of the scow, or the river. From the stern, ten feet from the cabin door, the cabin itself was swallowed up and invisible.

With the steady, swinging motion of the riverman he began bailing. So regular became his movements that they ran in a sort of rhythmic accompaniment to his thoughts. The monotonous *splash, splash, splash* of the outflung pails of water assumed, after a few minutes, the character of a mechanical thing. He could smell the nearness of the shore. Even in the rain the tang of cedar and balsam came to him faintly.

But it was the river that impressed itself most upon his senses. It seemed to him, as the minutes passed, like a living thing. He could hear it gurgling and playing under the end of the scow. And with that sound there was another and more indescribable thing, the tremble of it, the pulse of it, the thrill of it in the impenetrable gloom, the life of it as it swept on in a slow and mighty flood between its wilderness walls.

Kent had always said, "You can hear the river's heart beat—if you know how to listen for it." And he heard it now. He felt it. The rain could not beat it out, nor could the splash of the water he was throwing overboard drown it, and the darkness could not hide it from the vision that was burning like a living coal within him. Always it was the river that had given him consolation in times of loneliness. For him it had grown into a thing with a soul, a thing that personified hope, courage, comradeship, everything that was big and great in final achievement. And tonight—for he still thought of the darkness as night—the soul of it seemed whispering to him a sort of pæan.

He could not lose. That was the thought that filled him. Never had his pulse beat with greater assurance, never had a more positive sense of the inevitable possessed him. It was inconceivable, he thought, even to fear the possibility of being taken by the Police. He was more than a man fighting for his freedom alone, more than an individual struggling for the right to exist. A thing vastly more priceless than either freedom or life, if they were to be accepted alone, waited for him in the little cabin, shut in by its sea of darkness. And ahead of them lay their world. He emphasized that. *Their* world—the world which, in an illusive and unreal sort of way, had been a part of his dreams all his life. In that world they would shut themselves in. No one would ever find

them. And the glory of the sun and the stars and God's open country would be with them always.

Marette was the very heart of that reality which impinged itself upon him now. He did not worry about what it was she would tell him tomorrow, or day after tomorrow. He believed that it was then —when she had told him what there was to tell, and he still reached out his arms to her—that she would come into those arms. And he knew that nothing that might have happened in Kedsty's room would keep his arms from reaching to her. Such was his faith, potent as the mighty flood hidden in the gray-ghost gloom of approaching dawn.

Yet he did not expect to win easily. As he worked, his mind swept up and down the Three Rivers from the Landing to Fort Simpson, and mentally he pictured the situations that might arise, and how he would triumph over them. He figured that the men at Barracks would not enter Kedsty's bungalow until noon at the earliest. The Police gasoline launch would probably set out on a river search soon after. By mid-afternoon the scow would have a fifty-mile start.

Before darkness came again they would be through the Death Chute, where Follette and Ladouceur swam their mad race for the love of a girl. And not many miles below the Chute was a swampy country where he could hide the scow. Then they would start overland, west and north. Given until another sunset,

and they would be safe. This was what he expected. But if it came to fighting—he would fight.

The rain had slackened to a thin drizzle by the time he finished his bailing. The aroma of cedar and balsam came to him more clearly, and he heard more distinctly the murmuring surge of the river. He tapped again at the door of the cabin, and Marette answered him.

The fire had burned down to a bed of glowing coals when he entered. Again he fell on his knees, and took off his dripping slicker.

The girl greeted him from the berth. "You look like a great bear, Jeems." There was a glad, welcoming note in her voice.

He laughed, and drew the stool beside her, and managed to sit on it, the roof compelling him to bend his head over a little. "I feel like an elephant in a birdcage," he replied. "Are you comfortable, little Gray Goose?"

"Yes. But you, Jeems? You are wet!"

"But so happy that I don't feel it, Gray Goose."

He could make her out only dimly there in the darkness of the berth. Her face was a pale shadow, and she had loosened her damp hair so that the warmth and dry air might reach it more easily. Kent wondered if she could hear the beating of his heart. He forgot the fire, and the darkness grew thicker. He could no longer see the pale outline of her face, and he drew back a little, possessed by the thought that it

was sacrilegious to bend nearer to her, like a thief, in that gloom. She sensed his movement, and her hand reached to him and lay lightly with its finger-tips touching his arm.

"Jeems," she said softly. "I'm not sorry—now—that I came up to Cardigan's place that day—when you thought you were dying. I wasn't wrong. You are different. And I made fun of you then, and laughed at you, because I knew that you were not going to die. Will you forgive me?"

He laughed happily. "It's funny how little things work out, sometimes," he said. "Wasn't a kingdom lost once upon a time because some fellow didn't have a horseshoe? Anyway, I knew of a man whose life was saved because of a broken pipe-stem. And you came to me, and I'm here with you now, because——"

"Of what?" she whispered.

"Because of something that happened a long time ago," he said. "Something you wouldn't dream could have anything to do with you or with me. Shall I tell you about it, Marette?"

Her fingers pressed slightly upon his arm. "Yes."

"Of course, it's a story of the Police," he began. "And I won't mention this fellow's name. You may think of him as that red-headed O'Connor, if you want to. But I don't say that it was he. He was a constable in the Service and had been away North looking up some Indians who were brewing an intoxicating liquor from roots. That was six years ago. And

he caught something. Le Mort Rouge, we sometimes call it—the Red Death—or smallpox. And he was alone when the fever knocked him down, three hundred miles from anywhere. His Indian ran away at the first sign of it, and he had just time to get up his tent before he was flat on his back. I won't try to tell you of the days he went through. It was a living death. And he would have died, there is no doubt of it, if it hadn't been for a stranger who came along. He was a white man. Marette, it doesn't take a great deal of nerve to go up against a man with a gun, when you've got a gun of your own; and it doesn't take such a lot of nerve to go into battle when a thousand others are going with you. But it does take nerve to face what that stranger faced. And the sick man was nothing to him. He went into that tent and nursed the other back to life. Then the sickness got him, and for ten weeks those two were together, each fighting to save the other's life, and they won out. But the glory of it was with the stranger. He was going west. The constable was going south. They shook hands and parted."

Marette's fingers tightened on Kent's arm. And Kent went on.

"And the constable never forgot, Gray Goose. He wanted the day to come when he might repay. And the time came. It was years later, and it worked out in a curious way. A man was murdered. And the constable, who had become a sergeant now, had talked

with the dead man only a little while before he was killed. Returning for something he had forgotten, it was the sergeant who found him dead. Very shortly afterward a man was arrested. There was blood on his clothing. The evidence was convincing, deadly. And this man——"

Kent paused, and in the darkness Marette's hand crept down his arm to his hand, and her fingers closed round it.

"Was the man you lied to save," she whispered.

"Yes. When the halfbreed's bullet got me, I thought it was a good chance to repay Sandy McTrigger for what he did for me in that tent years before. But it wasn't heroic. It wasn't even brave. I thought I was going to die and that I was risking nothing."

And then there came a soft, joyous little laugh from where her head lay on the pillow. "And all the time you were lying so splendidly, Jeems—I *knew,*" she cried. "I knew that you didn't kill Barkley, and I knew that you weren't going to die, and I knew what happened in that tent ten years ago. And—Jeems—Jeems——"

She raised herself from the pillow. Her breath was coming a little excitedly. Both her hands, instead of one, were gripping his hand now. "I knew that you didn't kill John Barkley," she repeated. "And —*Sandy McTrigger didn't kill him!*"

"But——"

"He *didn't,*" she interrupted him, almost fiercely.

"He was innocent, as innocent as you were. Jeems—Jeems—I know who killed Barkley. Oh, I *know*—I *know!*"

A choking sob came into her throat, and then she added, in a voice which she was straining to make calm, "Don't think that I haven't faith in you because I can't tell you more now, Jeems," she said. "You will understand—quite soon. When we are safe from the Police, I shall tell you. I shall keep nothing from you then. I shall tell you about Barkley, and Kedsty—everything. But I can't now. It won't be long. When you tell me we are safe, I shall believe you. And then——" She withdrew her hands from his and dropped back on her pillow.

"And then—what?" he asked, leaning far over.

"You may not like me, Jeems."

"I love you," he whispered. "Nothing in the world can stop my loving you."

"Even if I tell you—soon—that I killed Barkley?"

"No. You would be lying."

"Or—if I told you—that I—killed—Kedsty?"

"No matter what you said, or what proof there might be back there, I would not believe you."

She was silent. And then, "Jeems——"

"Yes, Niska, Little Goddess——?"

"I'm going to tell you something—now!"

He waited.

"It is going to—shock you—Jeems."

He felt her arms reaching up. Her two hands touched his shoulders.

"Are you listening?"

"Yes, I am listening."

"Because I'm not going to say it very loud." And then she whispered, "Jeems—*I love you!*"

CHAPTER XXI

IN the slowly breaking gloom of the cabin, with Marette's arms round his neck, her soft lips given him to kiss, Kent for many minutes was conscious of nothing but the thrill of his one great hope on earth come true. What he had prayed for was no longer a prayer, and what he had dreamed of was no longer a dream; yet for a space the reality of it seemed unreal. What he said in those first moments of his exaltation he would probably never remember.

His own physical existence seemed a thing trivial and almost lost, a thing submerged and swallowed up by the warm beat and throb of that other life, a thousand times more precious than his own, which he held in his arms. Yet with the mad thrill that possessed him, in the embrace of his arms, there was an infinite tenderness, a gentleness, that drew from Marette's lips a low, glad whispering of his name. She drew his head down and kissed him, and Kent fell upon his knees at her side and crushed his face close down to her—while outside the patter of rain on the roof had ceased, and the fog-like darkness was breaking with gray dawn.

In that dawn of the new day Kent came at last out of the cabin and looked upon a splendid world.

In his breast was the glory of a thing new-born, and the world, like himself, was changed. Storm had passed. The gray river lay under his eyes. Shoreward he made out the dark outlines of the deep spruce and cedar and balsam forests. About him there was a great stillness, broken only by the murmur of the river and the ripple of water under the scow. Wind had gone with the black rainclouds, and Kent, as he looked about him, saw the swift dissolution of the last shadows of night, and the breaking in the East of a new paradise. In the East, as the minutes passed, there came a soft and luminous gray, and after that, swiftly, with the miracle of far Northern dawn, a vast, low-burning fire seemed to start far beyond the forests, tinting the sky with a delicate pink that crept higher and higher as Kent watched it. The river, all at once, came out of its last drifting haze of fog and night. The scow was about in the middle of the channel. Two hundred yards on either side were thick green walls of forest glistening fresh and cool with the wet of storm and breathing forth the perfume which Kent was drawing deep into his lungs.

In the cabin he heard sound. Marette was up, and he was eager to have her come out and stand with him in this glory of their first day. He watched the smoke of the fire he had built, hardwood smoke that drifted up white and clean into the rain-washed air.

The smell of it, like the smell of balsam and cedar, was to Kent the aroma of life. And then he began

to clean out what was left of the water in the bottom of the scow, and as he worked he whistled. He wanted Marette to hear that whistle. He wanted her to know that day had brought with it no doubt for him. A great and glorious world was about them and ahead of them. And they were safe.

As he worked, his mind became more than ever set upon the resolution to take no chances. He paused in his whistling for a moment to laugh softly and exultantly as he thought of the years of experience which were his surest safeguard now. He had become almost uncannily expert in all the finesse and trickery of his craft of hunting human game, and he knew what the man-hunters would do and what they would not do. He had them checkmated at the start. And, besides—with Kedsty, O'Connor, and himself gone—the Landing was short-handed just at present. There was an enormous satisfaction in that. But even with a score of men behind him Kent knew that he would beat them. His hazard, if there was peril at all, lay in this first day. Only the Police gasoline launch could possibly overtake them. And with the start they had, he was sure they would pass the Death Chute, conceal the scow, and take to the untracked forests north and west before the launch could menace them. After that he would keep always west and north, deeper and deeper into that wild and untraveled country which would be the last place in which the Law would seek for them. He straightened himself

and looked at the smoke again, drifting like gray-white lace between him and the blue of the sky, and in that moment the sun capped the tall green tops of the highest cedars, and day broke gloriously over the earth.

For a quarter of an hour longer Kent mopped at the floor of the scow, and then—with a suddenness that drew him up as if a whip-lash had snapped behind him—he caught another aroma in the clean, forest-scented air. It was bacon and coffee! He had believed that Marette was taking her time in putting on dry footwear and making some sort of morning toilet. Instead of that, she was getting breakfast. It was not an extraordinary thing to do. To fry bacon and make coffee was not, in any sense, a remarkable achievement. But at the present moment it was the crowning touch to Kent's paradise. She was getting *his* breakfast! And—coffee and bacon— To Kent those two things had always stood for home. They were intimate and companionable. Where there were coffee and bacon, he had known children who laughed, women who sang, and men with happy, welcoming faces. They were home-builders.

"Whenever you smell coffee and bacon at a cabin," O'Connor had always said, "they'll ask you in to breakfast if you knock at the door."

But Kent was not recalling his old trail mate's words. In the present moment all other thoughts were

lost in the discovery that Marette was getting breakfast—for him.

He went to the door and listened. Then he opened it and looked in. Marette was on her knees before the open door of the stove, toasting bread on two forks. Her face was flushed pink. She had not taken time to brush her hair, but had woven it carelessly into a thick braid that fell down her back. She gave a little exclamation of mock disappointment when she saw Kent.

"Why didn't you wait?" she remonstrated. "I wanted to surprise you."

"You have," he said. "And I couldn't wait. I had to come in and help."

He was inside the door and on his knees beside her. As he reached for the two forks, his lips pressed against her hair. The pink deepened in Marette's face, and the soft little note that was like laughter came into her throat. Her hand caressed his cheek as she rose to her feet, and Kent laughed back. And after that, as she arranged things on the shelf table, her hand now and then touched his shoulder, or his hair, and two or three times he heard that wonderful little throat-note that sent through him a wild pulse of happiness. And then, he sitting in the low chair and she on the stool, they drew close together before the board that answered as a table, and ate their breakfast. Marette poured his coffee and stirred sugar and condensed milk in it, and so happy was Kent that he

did not tell her he used neither milk nor sugar in his coffee. The morning sun burst through the little window, and through the open door Kent pointed to the glory of it on the river and in the shimmering green of the forests slipping away behind. When they had finished, Marette went outside with him.

For a space she stood silent and without movement, looking upon the marvelous world that encompassed them. It seemed to Kent that for a few moments she did not breathe. With her head thrown back and her white throat bare to the soft, balsam-laden air she faced the forests. Her eyes became suddenly filled with the luminous glow of stars. Her face reflected the radiance of the rising sun, and Kent, looking at her, knew that he had never seen her so beautiful as in these wonderful moments. He held his own breath, for he also knew that Niska, his goddess, was looking upon her own world again after a long time away.

Her world—and his. Different from all the other worlds God had ever made; different, even, from the world only a few miles behind them at the Landing. For here was no sound or whisper of destroying human life. They were in the embrace of the Great North, and it was drawing them closer, and with each minute nearer to the mighty, pulsing heart of it.

The forests hung heavy and green and glistening with the wet of storm; out of them came the tremulous breath of life and the glory of living; they hugged the shores like watchful hosts guarding the river from

civilization—and suddenly the girl held out her arms, and Kent heard the low, thrilling cry that came to her lips.

She had forgotten him. She had forgotten everything but the river, the forests, and the untrod worlds beyond them, and he was glad. For this world that she was welcoming, that her soul was crying out to, was his world, for ever and ever. It held his dreams, his hopes, all the desires that he had in life. And when at last Marette turned toward him slowly, his arms were reaching out to her, and in his face she saw that same glory which filled her own.

"I'm glad—glad," she cried softly. "Oh, Jeems—I'm glad!"

She came into his arms without hesitation; her hands stroked his face; and then she stood with her head against his shoulder, looking ahead, breathing deeply now of the sweet, clear air filled with the elixir of the hovering forests. She did not speak, or move, and Kent remained quiet. The scow drifted around a bend. Shoreward a great moose splashed up out of the water, and they could hear him afterward, crashing through the forest. Her body tensed, but she did not speak. After a little he heard her whisper,

"It has been a long time, Jeems. I have been away four years."

"And now we are going home, little Gray Goose. You will not be lonely?"

"No. I was lonely down there. There were so

many people, and so many things, that I was homesick for the woods and mountains. I believe I would have died soon. There were only two things I loved, Jeems——"

"What?" he asked.

"Pretty dresses—and shoes."

His arms closed about her a little more tightly. "I —I understand," he laughed softly. "That is why you came, that first time, with pretty high-heeled pumps."

He bowed his head, and she turned her face to him. On her upturned mouth he kissed her.

"More than any other man ever loved a woman I love you, Niska, little goddess," he cried.

The minutes and the hours of that day stood out ever afterward in Kent's life as unforgettable memories. There were times when they seemed illusory and unreal, as though he lived and breathed in an insubstantial world made up of gossamer things which must be the fabric of dream. These were moments when the black shadow of the tragedy from which they were fleeing pressed upon him, when the thought came to him that they were criminals racing with the law; that they were not on enchanted ground, but in deadly peril; that it was all a fools' paradise from which some terrible shock would shortly awaken him. But these periods of apprehension were, in themselves, mere shadows thrown for a moment upon his happiness. Again and again the subconscious force within

him pounded home to his physical brain the great truth, that it was all extraordinarily real.

It was Marette who made him doubt himself at times. He could not, quite yet, comprehend the fulness of that love which she had given him. More than ever, in the glory of this love that had come to them she was like a child to him. It seemed to him in the first hours of the morning that she had forgotten yesterday, and the day before, and all the days before that. She was going home. She whispered that to him so often that it became a little song in his brain. Yet she told him nothing of that home, and he waited, knowing that the fulfilment of her promise was not far away. And there was no embarrassment in the manner of her surrender when he held her in his arms, and she held her face up, so that he could kiss her mouth and look into her glowing, lovely eyes. What he saw was the flush of a great happiness, the almost childish confession of it along with the woman's joy of possession. And he thought of Kedsty, and of the Law that was rousing itself into life back at Athabasca Landing.

And then she ran her fingers through his own and told him to wait, and ran into the cabin and came out a moment later with her brush; and after that she seated herself at the fulcrum of the big sweep and began to brush out her hair in the sun.

"I'm glad you love it, Jeems," she said.

She unbound the thick braid and let the silken

strands of it run caressingly between her fingers. She smoothed it out, brushed it until it was more beautiful than he had ever seen it, in that glow of the sun. She held it up so that it rippled out in shimmering cascades about her—and then, suddenly, Kent saw the short tress from which had been clipped the rope of hair that he had taken from Kedsty's neck. And as his lips tightened, crushing fiercely the exclamation of his horror, there came a trembling happiness from Marette's lips, scarcely more than the whisper of a song, the low, thrilling melody of *Le Chaudière.*

Her arms reached up, and she drew his head down to her, so that for a time his visions were blinded in that sweet smother of her hair.

The intimacy of that day was in itself like a dream. Hour after hour they drifted deeper into the great North. The sun shone. The forest-walled shores of the river grew mightier in their stillness and their grandeur, and the vast silence of unpeopled places brooded over the world. To Kent it was as if they were drifting through Paradise. Occasionally he found it necessary to work the big sweep, for still water was gradually giving way to a swifter current.

Beyond that there was no labor for him to perform. It seemed to him that with each of these wonderful hours danger was being left farther and still farther behind them. Watching the shores, looking ahead, listening for sound that might come from behind—at times possessed of the exquisite thrills of children in

their happiness—Kent and Marette found the gulf of strangeness passing swiftly away from between them.

They did not speak of Kedsty, or the tragedy, or again of the death of John Barkley. But Kent told of his days in the North, of his aloneness, of the wild, weird love in his soul for the deepest wildernesses. And from that he went away back into dim and distant yesterdays, alive with mellowed memories of boyhood days spent on a farm. To all these things Marette listened with glowing eyes, with low laughter, or with breath that rose or fell with his own emotions.

She told of her own days down at school and of their appalling loneliness; of childhood spent in the forests; of the desire to live there always. But she did not speak intimately of herself or her life in its more vital aspects; she said nothing of the home in the Valley of Silent Men, nothing of father or mother, sisters or brothers. There was no embarrassment in her omissions. And Kent did not question. He knew that those were among the things she would tell him when that promised hour came, the hour when he would tell her they were safe.

There began to possess him now a growing eagerness for this hour, when they should leave the river and take to the forests. He explained to Marette why they could not float on indefinitely. The river was the one great artery through which ran the blood of all traffic to the far North. It was patrolled. Sooner or later they would be discovered. In the forests,

with a thousand untrod trails to choose, they would be safe. He had only one reason for keeping to the river until they passed through the Death Chute. It would carry them beyond a great swampy region to the westward through which it would be impossible for them to make their way at this season of the year. Otherwise he would have gone ashore now. He loved the river, had faith in it, but he knew that not until the deep forests swallowed them, as a vast ocean swallows a ship, would they be beyond the peril that threatened them from the Landing.

Three or four times between sunrise and noon they saw life ashore and on the stream; once a scow tied to a tree, then an Indian camp, and twice trappers' shacks built in the edge of little clearings. With the beginning of afternoon Kent felt growing within him something that was not altogether eagerness. It was, at times, a disturbing emotion, a foreshadowing of evil, a warning for him to be on his guard. He used the sweep more, to help their progress in the current, and he began to measure time and distance with painstaking care. He recognized many landmarks.

By four o'clock, or five at the latest, they would strike the head of the Chute. Ten minutes of its thrilling passage and he would work the scow into the concealment he had in mind ashore, and no longer would he fear the arm of the law that reached out from the Landing. As he planned, he listened. From noon on he never ceased to listen for that distant *putt*

putt, putt, that would give them a mile's warning of the approach of the patrol launch.

He did not keep his plans to himself. Marette sensed his growing uneasiness, and he made her a partner of his thoughts.

"If we hear the patrol before we reach the Chute, we'll still have time to run ashore," he assured her. "And they won't catch us. We'll be harder to find than two needles in a haystack. But it's best to be prepared."

So he brought out his pack and Marette's smaller bundle, and laid his rifle and pistol holster across them.

It was three o'clock when the character of the river began to change, and Kent smiled happily. They were entering upon swifter waters. There were places where the channel narrowed, and they sped through rapids. Only where unbroken straight waters stretched out ahead of them did Kent give his arms a rest at the sweep. And through most of the straight water he added to the speed of the scow. Marette helped him. In him the exquisite thrill of watching her slender, glorious body as it worked with his own never grew old. She laughed at him over the big oar between them. The wind and sun played riot in her hair. Her parted lips were rose-red, her cheeks flushed, her eyes like sun-warmed rock violets. More than once, in the thrill of that afternoon flight, as he looked at the marvelous beauty of her, he asked himself if

it could be anything but a dream. And more than once he laughed joyously, and paused in his swinging of the sweep, and proved that it was real and true. And Kent thanked God, and worked harder.

Once, a long time ago, Marette told him, she had been through the Chute. It had horrified her then. She remembered it as a sort of death monster, roaring for its victims. As they drew nearer to it, Kent told her more about it. Only now and then was a life lost there now, he said. At the mouth of the Chute there was a great, knife-like rock, like a dragon's tooth, that cut the Chute into two roaring channels. If a scow kept to the left-hand channel it was safe. There would be a mighty roaring and thundering as it swept on its passage, but that roaring of the Chute, he told her, was like the barking of a harmless dog.

Only when a scow became unmanageable, or hit the Dragon's Tooth, or made the right-hand channel instead of the left, was there tragedy. There was that delightful little note of laughter in Marette's throat when Kent told her that.

"You mean, Jeems, that if one of three possible things doesn't happen, we'll get through safely?"

"None of them is possible—with us," he corrected himself quickly. "We've a tight little scow, we're not going to hit the rock, and we'll make the left-hand channel so smoothly you won't know when it happens." He smiled at her with splendid confidence. "I've been through it a hundred times," he said.

He listened. Then, suddenly, he drew out his watch. It was a quarter of four. Marette's ears caught what he heard. In the air was a low, trembling murmur. It was growing slowly but steadily. He nodded when she looked at him, the question in her eyes.

"The rapids at the head of the Chute!" he cried his voice vibrant with joy. "We've beat them out. *We're safe!*"

They swung around a bend, and the white spume of the rapids lay half a mile ahead of them. The current began to race with them now. Kent put his whole weight on the sweep to keep the scow in mid-channel.

"We're safe," he repeated. "Do you understand, Marette? *We're safe!*"

He was speaking the words for which she had waited, was telling her that at last the hour had come when she could keep her promise to him. The words, as he gave them voice, thrilled him. He felt like shouting them. And then all at once he saw the change that had come into her face. Her wide, startled eyes were not looking at him, but beyond. She was looking back in the direction from which they had come, and even as he stared her face grew white.

"Listen!"

She was tense, rigid. He turned his head. And in that moment it came to him above the growing murmur of the river—the *putt, putt, putt* of the Police patrol boat from Athabasca Landing!

A deep breath came from between his lips. When

Marette took her eyes from the river and looked at him, his face was like carven rock. He was staring dead ahead.

"We can't make the Chute," he said, his voice sounding hard and unreal to her. "If we do, they'll be up with us before we can land at the other end. We must let this current drive us ashore—*now.*"

As he made his decision, he put the strength of his body into action. He knew there was not the hundredth part of a second to lose. The outreaching suction of the rapids was already gripping the scow, and with mighty strokes he fought to work the head of his craft toward the westward shore. With swift understanding Marette saw the priceless value of a few seconds of time. If they were caught in the stronger swirl of the rapids before the shore was reached, they would be forced to run the Chute, and in that event the launch would be upon them before they could make a landing farther on. She sprang to Kent's side and added her own strength in the working of the sweep. Foot by foot and yard by yard the scow made precious westing, and Kent's face lighted up with triumph as he nodded ahead to a timbered point that thrust itself out like a stubby thumb into the river. Beyond that point the rapids were frothing white, and they could see the first black walls of rock that marked the beginning of the Chute.

"We'll make it," he smiled confidently. "We'll hit that timbered point close inshore. I don't see where

the launch can make a landing anywhere within a mile of the Chute. And once ashore we'll make trail about five times as fast they can follow it." Marette's face was no longer pale, but flushed with excitement. He caught the white gleam of teeth between her parted lips. Her eyes shone gloriously, and he laughed.

"You beautiful little fighter," he cried exultantly. "You—you——"

His words were cut short by a snap that was like the report of a pistol close to his ears. He pitched forward and crashed to the bottom of the scow, Marette's slim body clutched in his arms as he fell. In a flash they were up, and mutely they stared where the sweep had been. The blade of it was gone. Kent was conscious of hearing a little cry from the girl at his side, and then her fingers were gripping tightly again about his thumb. No longer possessed of the power of guidance, the scow swung sideways. It swept past the wooded point. The white maelstrom of the lower rapids seized upon it. And Kent, looking ahead to the black maw of the death-trap that was waiting for them, drew Marette close in his arms and held her tight.

CHAPTER XXII

FOR a brief space after the breaking of the scow-sweep Kent did not move. He felt Marette's arms closing tighter and tighter around his neck. He caught a flash of her upturned face, the flush of a few moments before replaced by a deathly pallor, and he knew that without explanation on his part she understood the almost hopeless situation they were in. He was glad of that. It gave him a sense of relief to know that she would not go into a panic, no matter what happened. He bowed his face to hers, so that he felt the velvety smoothness of her cheek. She turned her mouth to him, and they kissed. His embrace was crushing for a moment, fierce with his love for her, desperate with his determination to keep her from harm.

His brain was working swiftly. There was possibly one chance in ten that the scow—rudderless and without human guidance—would sweep safely between the black walls and jagged teeth of the Chute. Even if the scow made this passage, they would be in the power of the Police, unless some splendid whimsicality of Fate sent it ashore before the launch came through.

On the other hand, if it was carried far enough through the lower rapids, they might swim. And

there was the rifle lying across the pack. That, after all, was his greatest hope—if the scow made the passage of the Chute. The bulwarks of the scow would give them greater protection than the thinner walls of the launch would give to their pursuers. In his heart there raged suddenly a hatred for that Law of which he had been a part. It was running them to destruction, and he would fight. There would not be more than three men in the launch, and he would kill them, if killing became a necessity.

They were speeding like an unbridled race-horse through the boiling rapids now. The clumsy craft under their feet twisted and turned. The dripping tops of great rocks shot past a little out of their channel. And Marette, with one arm still about his neck, was facing the peril ahead with him. They could see the Dragon's Tooth, black and grim, waiting squarely in their path. In another hundred and twenty seconds they would be upon it—or past it. There was no time for Kent to explain. He sprang to his pack, whipped a knife from his pocket, and cut the stout babiche rope that reënforced its straps. In another instant he was back at Marette's side, fastening the babiche about her waist. The other end he gave to her, and she tied it about his wrist. She smiled as she finished the knot. It was a strange, tense little smile, but it told him that she was not afraid, that she had great faith in him, and knew what the babiche meant.

"I can swim, Jeems," she cried. "If we strike the rock."

She did not finish because of the sudden cry that came to his lips. He had almost forgotten the most vital of all things. There was not time to unlace his boots. With his knife he cut the laces in a single downward thrust. Swiftly he freed his own feet, and Marette's. Even in this hour of their peril it thrilled him to see how quickly Marette responded to the thoughts that moved him. She tore at her outer garments and slipped them off as he wriggled out of his heavy shirt. A slim, white-underskirted little thing, her glorious hair flying in the wind that came through the Chute, her throat and arms bare, her eyes shining at Kent, she came again close within his arms, and her lips framed softly his name. And a moment later she turned her face up, and cried quickly,

"Kiss me, Jeems—kiss me——"

Her warm lips clung to his, and her bare arms encircled his neck with the choking grip of a child's. He looked ahead and braced himself on his feet, and after that he buried one of his hands in the soft mass of her hair and pressed her face against his naked breast.

Ten seconds later the crash came. Squarely amidships the scow struck the Dragon's Tooth. Kent was prepared for the shock, but his attempt to hold his feet, with Marette in his arms, was futile. The bulwark saved them from crashing against the slippery face of the rock itself. Amid the roar of water that

filled his ears he was conscious of the rending of timbers. The scow bulged up with the mighty force beneath, and for a second or two it seemed as though that force was going to overturn and submerge it. Then slowly it began to slip off the nose of the rock.

Holding to the rail with one hand and clinging to Marette with his other arm, Kent was gripped in the horror of what was happening. The scow was slipping *into the right hand channel!* In that channel there was no hope—only death.

Marette was squarely facing the thing ahead. In this hour when each second held a lifetime of suspense Kent saw that she understood. Yet she did not cry out. Her face was dead white. Her hair and arms and shoulders were dripping with the splash of water. But she was not terrified as he had seen terror. When she turned her eyes to him, he was amazed by the quiet, calm look that was in them. Her lips trembled.

His soul expressed itself in a wordless cry that was drowned in another crash of timber as a jutting snag of the Tooth crumpled up the little cabin as if it had been pasteboard. He felt overwhelming him the surge of a thing mightier than the menace of the Chute. He could not lose! It was inconceivable. Impossible! With *her* to fight for—this slim, wonderful creature who smiled at him even as she saw death.

And then, as his arm closed still more tightly about her, the monsters of power and death gave him their

answer. The scow swung free of the Dragon's Tooth, half-filled with water. Its cracked and broken carcass was caught in the rock jaws of the eastern channel. It ceased to be a floating thing. It was inundation, dissolution, utter obliteration almost without shock. And Kent found himself in the thundering rush of waters, holding to Marette.

For a space they were under. Black water and white froth fumed and exploded over them. It seemed an age before fresh air filled Kent's nostrils. He thrust Marette upward and cried out to her. He heard her answer.

"I'm all right—Jeems!"

His swimming prowess was of little avail now. He was like a chip. All his effort was to make of himself a barrier between Marette's soft body and the rocks It was not the water itself that he feared, but the rocks.

There were scores and hundreds of them, like the teeth of a mighty grinding machine. And the jaw was a quarter of a mile in length. He felt the first shock, the second, the third. He was not thinking of time or distance, but was fighting solely to keep himself between Marette and death. The first time he failed, a blind sort of rage burned in his brain.

He saw her white body strained over a slippery, deluge-worn rock. Her head was flung back, and he saw the long masses of her hair streaming out in the white froth, and he thought for an instant that her fragile body had been broken. He fought still more

fiercely after that. And she knew for what he was fighting. Only in an unreal sort of way was he conscious of shock and hurt. It gave him no physical pain. Yet he sensed the growing dizziness in his head, an increasing lack of strength in his arms and body.

They were halfway through the Chute when he shot against a rock with terrific force. The contact tore Marette from him. He plunged for her, missed his grip, and then saw her opposite him, clinging to the same rock. The babiche rope had saved her. Fastened about her waist and tied to his wrist, it still held them together—with the five feet of rock between them.

Panting, their life half beaten out of them, their eyes met over that rock. Now that he was out of the water, the blood began streaming from Kent's arms and shoulders and face, but he smiled at her as a few moments before she had smiled at him. Her eyes were filled with the pain of his hurts. He nodded back in the direction from which they had come.

"We're out of the worst of it," he tried to shout. "As soon as we've got our wind, I will climb over the rock to you. It won't take us longer than a couple of minutes, perhaps less, to make the quiet water at the end of the channel."

She heard him and nodded her reply. He wanted to give her confidence. And he had no intention of resting, for her position filled him with a terror which he fought to hide. The babiche rope, not half as large around as his little finger, had swung her to the down-

stream side of the rock. It was the slender thread of buckskin and his own weight that were holding her. If the buckskin should break——

He thanked God that it was the tough babiche that had been around his pack. An inch at a time he began to draw himself up on the rock. The undertow behind the rock had flung a mass of Marette's long hair toward him, so that it was a foot or two nearer to him than her clinging hands. He worked himself toward that, for he saw that he could reach it more quickly than he could reach her. At the same time he had to keep his end of the babiche taut. It was, from the beginning, an almost superhuman task. The rock was slippery as oil. Twice his eyes shot down-stream, with the thought that it might be better to cast himself bodily into the water, and after that draw Marette to him by means of the babiche. What he saw convinced him that such action would be fatal. He must have Marette in his arms. If he lost her—even for a few seconds—the life would be beaten from her body in that rock-strewn maelstrom below.

And then, suddenly, the babiche cord about his wrist grew loose. The reaction almost threw him back. With the loosening of it a cry came from Marette. It all happened in an instant, in almost less time than his brain could seize upon the significance of it—the slipping of her hands from the rock, the shooting of her white body away from him in the still whiter spume of the rapids. The rock had cut the babiche,

and she was gone! With a cry that was like the cry of a madman he plunged after her. The water engulfed him. He twisted himself up, freeing himself from the undertow. Twenty feet ahead of him—thirty—he caught a glimpse of a white arm and then of Marette's face, before she disappeared in a wall of froth.

Into that froth he shot after her. He came out of it blinded, groping wildly for her, crying out her name. His fingers caught the end of the babiche that was fastened about his own wrist, and he clutched it savagely, believing for a moment that he had found her. Thicker and more deadly the rocks of the lower passage rose in his way. They seemed like living things, like devils filled with the desire to torture and destroy. They struck and beat at him. Their laughter was the roar of a Niagara. He no longer cried out. His brain grew heavy, and clubs were beating him—beating and breaking him into a formless thing. The rock-drifts of spume, lather-white, like the frosting of a monster cake, turned gray and then black.

He did not know when he ceased fighting. The day went out. Night came. The world was oblivion. And for a space he ceased to live.

CHAPTER XXIII

AN hour later the fighting forces in his body dragged Kent back into existence. He opened his eyes. The shock of what had happened did not at once fall upon him. His first sensation was of awakening from a sleep that had been filled with pain and horror.

Then he saw a black rock wall opposite him; he heard the sullen roar of the stream; his eyes fell upon a vivid patch of light reflected from the setting sun. He dragged himself up until he was on his knees, and all at once a thing that was like an iron hoop—choking his senses—seemed to break in his head, and he staggered to his feet, crying out Marette's name. Understanding inundated him with its horror, deadening his tongue after that first cry, filling his throat with a moaning, sobbing agony. Marette was gone. She was lost. She was dead.

Swiftly, as reason came, his eyes took in his environment. For a quarter of a mile above him he could see the white spume between the chasm walls, darkening with the approach of night. He could hear more clearly the roar of the death-floods. But close to him was smooth water, and he stood now on a shelving tongue of rock and shale, upon which the current had flung him. In front of him was a rock wall. Behind

him was another. There was no footing except where he stood. And Marette was not with him.

Only the truth could batter at his brain as he stood there. But his physical self refused to accept that truth. If he had lived, she must live! She was there —somewhere—along the shore—among the rocks——

The moaning in his throat gave way to the voicing of her name. He shouted, and listened. He swayed back along the tongue of rock to the boulder-strewn edge of the chasm wall. A hundred yards farther on was the opening of the Chute. He came out of this, his clothes torn from him, his body bleeding, unrecognizable, half a madman,—shouting her name more and more loudly. The glow of the setting sun struck him at last. He was out from between the chasm walls, and it lighted up the green world for him. Ahead of him the river widened and swept on in tranquil quiet.

And now it was no longer fear that possessed him. It was the horrible, overwhelming certainty of the thing. The years fell from him, and he sobbed—sobbed like a boy stricken by some great childish grief, as he searched along the edge of the shore. Over and over again he cried and whispered Marette's name.

But he did not shout it again, for he knew that she was dead. She was gone from him forever. Yet he did not cease to search. The last of the sun went out. Twilight came, and then darkness. Even in that darkness he continued to search for a mile below the Chute, calling her name more loudly now, and listen-

ing always for the answer which he knew would never come. The moon came out after a time, and hour after hour he kept up his hopeless quest. He did not know how badly the rocks had battered and hurt him, and he scarcely knew when it was that exhaustion dropped him like a dead man in his tracks. When dawn came, it found him wandering away from the river, and toward noon of that day, he was found by André Boileau, the old white-haired half-breed who trapped on Burntwood Creek. André was shocked at the sight of his wounds and half dragged and half carried him to his shack hidden away in the forest.

For six days thereafter Kent remained at old André's place, simply because he had neither the strength nor the reason to move. André wondered that there were no broken bones in him. But his head was terribly hurt, and it was that hurt that for three days and three nights made Kent hover with nerve-racking indecision between life and death. The fourth day reason came back to him, and Boileau fed him venison broth. The fifth day he stood up. The sixth he thanked André, and said that he was ready to go.

André outfitted him with old clothes, gave him a supply of food and God's blessing. And Kent returned to the Chute, giving André to understand that his destination was Athabasca Landing.

Kent knew that it was not wise for him to return to the river. He knew that it would have been better for him both in mind and body had be gone in the

opposite direction. But he no longer had in him the desire to fight, even for himself. He followed the lines of least resistance, and these led him back to the scene of the tragedy. His grief, when he returned, was no longer the heartbreaking agony of that first night. It was a deep-seated, consuming fire that had already burned him out, heart and soul. Even caution was dead in him. He feared nothing, avoided nothing. Had the police boat been at the Chute, he would have revealed himself without any thought of self-preservation. A ray of hope would have been precious medicine to him. But there was no hope. Marette was dead. Her tender body was destroyed. And he was alone, unfathomably and hopelessly alone.

And now, after he had reached the river again, something held him there. From the head of the Chute to a bend in the river two miles below, his feet wore a beaten trail. Three or four times a day he would make the trip, and along the path he set a few snares in which he caught rabbits for food. Each night he made his bed in a crevice among the rocks at the foot of the Chute. At the end of a week the old Jim Kent was dead. Even O'Connor would not have recognized him with his shaggy growth of beard, his hollow eyes, and the sunken cheeks which the beard failed to hide.

And the fighting spirit in him also was dead. Once or twice there leaped up in him a sudden passion demanding vengeance upon the accursed Law that was

accountable for the death of Marette, but even this flame snuffed itself out quickly.

And then, on the eighth day, he saw the edge of a thing that was almost hidden under an overhanging bank. He fished it out. It was Marette's little pack, and for many minutes before he opened it Kent crushed the sodden treasure to his breast, staring with half-mad eyes down where he had found it, as if Marette must be there, too. Then he ran with it to an open space, where the sun fell warmly on a great, flat rock that was level with the ground, and with sobbing breath he opened it. It was filled with the things she had picked up quickly in her room the night of their flight from Kedsty's bungalow, and as he drew them out one by one and placed them in the sun on the rock, a new and sudden rush of life swept through his veins, and he sprang to his feet and faced the river again, as if at last a hope had come to him. Then he looked down again upon what she had treasured, and reaching out his arms to them, he whispered,

"Marette—my little goddess——"

Even in his grief the overwhelming mastery of his love for the one who was dead brought a smile to his haggard and bearded face. For Marette, in filling her little pack on that night of hurried flight, had chosen strange things. On the sunlit rock, where he had placed them, were a pair of the little pumps which he had fallen on his knees to worship in her room, and with these she had crowded into the pack one of the

billowing, sweet-smelling dresses which had made his heart stand still for a moment when he first looked into their hiding-place. It was no longer soft and cobwebby as it had been then, like down fluttering against his cheeks, but sodden and discolored, as it lay on the rock with little rivulets of water running from it.

With the shoes and the dress were the intimate necessities which Marette had taken with her. But it was one of the pumps that Kent picked up and crushed close to his ragged breast—one of the two she had worn that first wonderful day she had come to see him at Cardigan's place.

This hour was the beginning of another change in Kent. It seemed to him that a message had come to him from Marette herself, that the spirit of her had returned to him and was with him now, stirring strange things in his soul and warming his blood with a new heat. She was gone forever, and yet she had come back to him, and the truth grew upon him that this spirit of her would never leave him again as long as he lived. He felt her nearness. Unconsciously he reached out his arms, and a strange happiness entered into him to battle with grief and loneliness. His eyes shone with a new glow as they looked at her little belongings on the sunlit rock. It was as if they were flesh and blood of her, a part of her heart and soul. They were the voice of her faith in him, her promise that she would be with him always. For the first time in many days Kent felt a new force within him, and

he knew that she was not quite gone, that he had something of her left to fight for.

That night he made his bed for a last time in the crevice between the rocks, and his treasure was gathered within the protecting circle of his arms as he slept.

The next day he struck out north and east. On the fifth day after he left the country of André Boileau he traded his watch to a half-breed for a cheap gun, ammunition, a blanket, flour, and a cooking outfit. After that he had no hesitation in burying himself still deeper into the forests.

A month later no one would have recognized Kent as the one-time crack man of N Division. Bearded, ragged, long-haired, he wandered with no other purpose than to be alone and to get still farther away from the river. Occasionally he talked with an Indian or a half-breed. Each night, though the weather was very warm, he made himself a small camp-fire, for it was always in these hours, with the fire-light about him, that he felt Marette was very near. It was then that he took out one by one the precious things that were in Marette's little pack. He worshipped these things. The dress and each of the little shoes he had wrapped in the velvety inner bark of the birch tree. He protected them from wet and storm. Had emergency called for it, he would have fought for them. They became, after a time, more precious than his own life, and in a vague sort of way at first he began

to thank God that the river had not robbed him of everything.

Kent's inclination was not to fight himself into forgetfulness. He wanted to remember every act, every word, every treasured caress that chained him for all time to the love he had lost. Marette became more a part of him every day. Dead in the flesh, she was always at his side, nestling close in the shelter of his arms at night, walking with her hand in his during the day. And in this belief his grief was softened by the sweet and merciful comfort of a possession of which neither man nor fate could rob him—a beloved Presence always with him.

It was this Presence that rebuilt Kent. It urged him to throw up his head again, to square his shoulders, to look life once more straight in the face. It was both inspiration and courage to him and grew nearer and dearer to him as time passed. Early Autumn found him in the Fond du Lac country, two hundred miles east of Fort Chippewyan. That Winter he joined a Frenchman, and until February they trapped along the edges of the lower fingers of the Barrens.

He came to think a great deal of Picard, his comrade. But he revealed nothing of his secret to him, or of the new desire that was growing in him. And as the Winter lengthened this desire became a deep and abiding yearning. It was with him night and day. He dreamed of it when he slept, and it was never out of his thoughts when awake. He wanted to go *home.*

And when he thought of home, it was not of the Landing, and not of the country south. For him home meant only one place in the world now—the place where Marette had lived. Somewhere, hidden in the mountains far north and west, was that mysterious Valley of Silent Men where they had been going when her body died. And the spirit of her wanted him to go to it now. It was like a voice pleading with him, urging him to go, to live there always where she had lived. He began to plan, and in this planning he found new joy and new life. He would find her home, her people, the valley that was to have been their paradise.

So late in February, with his share of the Winter catch in his pack, he said good-by to Picard and faced the River again.

CHAPTER XXIV

KENT had not forgotten that he was an outlaw, but he was not afraid. Now that he had something new and thrilling to fight for, he fell back again upon what he called "the finesse of the game." He approached Chippewyan cautiously, although he was sure that even his old friends at the Landing would fail to recognize him now. His beard was four or five inches long, and his hair was shaggy and uncut. Picard had made him a coat, that winter, of young caribou skin, and it was fringed like an Indian's. Kent chose his time and entered Chippewyan just before dusk.

Oil lamps were burning in the Hudson's Bay Company's store when he went in with his furs. The place was empty, except for the factor's clerk, and for an hour he bartered. He bought a new outfit, a Winchester rifle, and all the supplies he could carry. He did not forget a razor and a pair of shears, and when he was done he still had the value of two silver fox skins in cash. He left Chippewyan that same night, and by the light of a Winter moon made his camp half a dozen miles northward toward Smith Landing.

He was on the Slave River now and for weeks traveled slowly but steadily northward on snowshoes. He avoided Fort Smith and Smith Landing and struck

westward before he came to Fort Resolution. It was in April that he struck Hay River Post, where the Hay River empties into Great Slave Lake. Until the ice broke up, Kent worked at Hay River. When it was safe, he started down the Mackenzie in a canoe. It was late in June when he turned up the Liard to the South Nahani.

"You go straight through between the sources of the North and the South Nahani," Marette had told him. "It is there you find the Sulphur Country, and beyond the Sulphur Country is the Valley of Silent Men."

At last he came to the edge of this country. He camped with the stink of it in his nostrils. The moon rose, and he saw that desolate world as through the fumes of a yellow smoke. With dawn he went on.

He passed through broad, low morasses out of which rose sulphurous fogs. Mile after mile he buried himself deeper in it, and it became more and more a dead country, a lost hell. There were berry bushes on which there grew no berries. There were forests and swamps, but without a living creature to inhabit them.

It was a country of water in which there were no fish, of air in which there were no birds, of plants without flowers—a reeking, stinking country still with the stillness of death. He began to turn yellow. His clothing, his canoe, his hands, face—everything turned yellow. He could not get the filthy taste of sulphur out of his mouth. Yet he kept on, straight west by

the compass Gowen had given him at Hay River. Even this compass became yellow in his pocket. It was impossible for him to eat. Only twice that day did he drink from his flask of water.

And Marette had made this journey! He kept telling himself that. It was the secret way in and out of their hidden world, a region accursed by devils, a forbidden country to both Indian and white man. It was hard for him to believe that she had come this way, that she had drunk in the air that was filling his own lungs, nauseating him a dozen times to the point of sickness. He worked desperately. He felt neither fatigue nor the heat of the warm water about him.

Night came, and the moon rose, lighting up with a sickly glow the diseased world that had swallowed him. He lay in the bottom of his canoe, covering his face with his caribou coat, and tried to sleep. But sleep would not come. Before dawn he struck on, watching his compass by the light of matches. All that day he made no effort to swallow food. But with the coming of the second night he found the air easier to breathe. He fought his way on by the light of the moon which was clearer now. And at last, in a resting spell, he heard far ahead of him the howl of a wolf.

In his joy he cried out. A western breeze brought him air that he drank in as a desert-stricken man drinks water. He did not look at his compass again, but worked steadily in the face of that fresh air. An hour later he found that he was paddling again a slow

current, and when he tasted the water it was only slightly tainted with sulphur. By midnight the water was cool and clean. He landed on a shore of sand and pebbles, stripped to the skin, and gave himself such a scouring as he had never before experienced. He had worn his old trapping shirt and trousers, and after his bath he changed to the outfit which he had kept clean in his pack. Then he built a fire and ate his first meal in two days.

The next morning he climbed a tall spruce and surveyed the country about him. Westward there was a broad low country shut in fifteen or twenty miles away by the foothills. Beyond these foothills rose the snow-capped peaks of the Rockies. He shaved himself, cut his hair, and went on. That night he camped only when he could drive his canoe no farther. The waterway had narrowed to a creek, and he was among the first green shoulders of the hills when he stopped. With another dawn he concealed his canoe in a sheltered place and went on with his pack.

For a week he picked his way slowly westward. It was a splendid country into which he had come, and yet he found no sign of human life. The foothills changed to mountains, and he believed he was in the Campbell Range. Also he knew that he had followed the logical trail from the sulphur country. Yet it was the eighth day before he came upon a sign which told him that another living being had at some time passed that way. What he found were the charred

remnants of an old camp-fire. It had been a white man's fire. He knew that by the size of it. It had been an all-night fire of green logs cut with an axe.

On the tenth day he came to the westward slope of the first range and looked down upon one of the most wonderful valleys his eyes had ever beheld. It was more than a valley. It was a broad plain. Fifty miles across it rose the towering majesty of the mightiest of all the Yukon mountains.

And now, though he saw a paradise about him, his heart began to sink within him. It seemed to him inconceivable that in a country so vast he could find the spot for which he was seeking. His one hope lay in finding white men or Indians, some one who might guide him.

He traveled slowly over the fifty-mile plain rich with a verdure of green, covered with flowers, a game paradise. Few hunters had come so far out of the Yukon mountains, he told himself. And none had come from out of the sulphur country. It was a new and undiscovered world. On his map it was a blank space. And there were no signs of people. Ahead of him the Yukon mountains rose in an impenetrable wall, peak after peak, crested with snow, towering like mighty watchdogs above the clouds. He knew what lay beyond them—the great rivers of the Western slope, Dawson City, the gold country and its civilization. But those things were on the other side of the mountains. On his side there was only the vast and undis-

puted silence of a paradise as yet unclaimed by man.

As he went on into this valley there grew upon him a strange and comforting peace. Yet with it there was a steadily increasing belief that he would not find that for which he had come in search. He did not attempt to analyze this belief. It became a part of him, just as his mental tranquillity had grown upon him. His one hope of success was that nearer the mountains he might find white men or Indians.

He no longer used his compass, but guided himself by a cluster of three gigantic peaks. One of these was taller than the other two. As he journeyed, his eyes were always returning to it. It fascinated him, impinged itself upon him as the watcher of a million years, guarding the valley. He began to think of it as the Watcher. Each hour of his progress seemed to bring it a little more intimately to his vision. From his first night's camp in the valley he saw the moon sink behind it. Within him a voice that never died kept whispering to him that this mountain, greater than all the others, had been Marette's guardian. Ten thousand times she must have looked at it, as he had looked at it that day—if her home was anywhere this side of the Campbell Range. A hundred miles away she could have seen the Watcher on a clear day.

On the second day the mountain continued to grow upon Kent. By mid-afternoon it began to take on a new character. The peak of it was in the form of a mighty castle that changed as he advanced. And the

two lesser peaks were forming into definite contours. Before the haze of twilight dimmed his vision, he knew that what he had seen was not a whimsical invention of his imagination. The Watcher had grown into the shape of a mighty human head facing south. A restless excitement possessed him, and he traveled on long after dusk. At dawn he was on the trail again. Westward the sky cleared, and suddenly he stopped, and a cry came from him.

The Watcher's head was there, as if chiseled by the hands of giants. The two smaller peaks had unveiled their mystery. Startling and weird, their crests had taken on the form of human heads. One of them was looking north. The other faced the valley. And Kent, his heart pounding, cried to himself,

"The Silent Men!"

He did not hear himself, but the thought itself was a tumultuous thing within him. It came upon him like an inundation, a sudden and thrilling inspiration backed by the forces of a visual truth. *The Valley of Silent Men.* He repeated the words, staring at the three colossal heads in the sky. Somewhere near them, under them,—one side or the other—was Marette's hidden valley!

He went on. A strange joy consumed him. In it, at times, his grief was obliterated, and it seemed to him in these moments that Marette must surely be at the valley to greet him when he came to it. But always the tragedy of the Death Chute came back to

him, and with it the thought that the three giant heads were watching—and would always watch—for a beloved lost one who would never return. As the sun went down that day, the face bowed to the valley seemed alive with the fire of a living question sent directly to Kent.

"Where is she?" it asked. "Where is she? Where is she?"

That night Kent did not sleep.

The next day there lay ahead of him a low and broken range, the first of the deeper mountains. He climbed this steadily, and at noon had reached the crest. And he knew that at last he was looking down into the Valley of Silent Men. It was not a wide valley, like the other. On the far side of it, three or four miles away, rose the huge mountain whose face was looking down upon the green meadows at its foot. Southward Kent could see for a long distance, and in the vivid sunlight he saw the shimmer of creeks and little lakes, and the rich glow of thick patches of cedar and spruce and balsam, scattered like great rugs of velvety luster amid the flowering green of the valley. Northward, three or four miles away the range which he had climbed made a sharp twist to the east, and that part of the valley—following the swing of the range—was lost to him. He turned in this direction after he had rested. It was four o'clock when he came to the elbow in the valley, and could look down into the hidden part of it.

What he saw at first was a giant cup hollowed out of the surrounding mountains, a cup two miles from brim to brim, the end of the valley itself. It took him a few moments to focus his vision so that it would pick up the smaller and more intimate things half a mile under him, and yet, before he had done this, a sound came up to him that set aquiver every nerve in his body. It was the far-down, hollow-sounding barking of a dog.

The warm, golden haze that precedes sunset in the mountains, was gathering between him and the valley, but through this he made out after a time evidences of human habitation almost straight under him. There was a small lake out of which ran a shimmering creek, and close to this lake, yet equally near to the base of the mountain on which he was standing, were a number of buildings and a stockade which looked like a toy. He could see no animals, no movement of any kind.

Without seeking for a downward trail he began to descend. Again he did not question himself. An overwhelming certainty possessed him. Of all places in the world this must be the Valley of Silent Men.

And below him, flooded and half-hidden in the illusive sun-mist, was Marette's old home. It seemed to him now that it belonged to him, that he was a part of it, that in going to it he was achieving his last great resting place, his final refuge, his own home. And the thought became strangely a part of him that a wel-

come must be waiting for him there. He hurried until his breath came pantingly between his lips and he was forced to rest. And at last he found himself where his progress was made a foot at a time, and again and again he was forced to climb back and detour around treacherous slides and precipitous breaks which left sheer falls at his feet. The mist thickened in the valley. The sun sank behind the western peaks, and swiftly after that the gloom of twilight deepened. It was seven o'clock when he came to the edge of the plain, at least a mile below the elbow which shut out the cup in the valley. He was exhausted. His hands were bruised and bleeding. Darkness shut him in when he went on.

When he rounded the elbow of the mountain, he did not try to keep back the joyous cry that came to his lips. Ahead of him there were lights. A few of them were scattered, but nearest to him he saw a cluster of them, like the glow that comes from a number of illumined windows. He quickened his pace as he drew nearer to them, and at last he wanted to run. And then something stopped him, and it seemed to him that his heart had risen into his throat and was choking him until he could not breathe.

It was a man's voice he heard, calling through the twilight gloom a name. "Marette—Marette—Marette——"

Kent tried to cry out, but his breath came only in a gasp. He felt himself trembling. He reached out

his arms, and a strange madness rushed like fire into his brain.

Again the voice called, "Marette—Marette—Marette——"

The cup in the valley echoed the name. It rolled softly up the mountainside. The air trembled with it, whispered it, passed it on—and suddenly the madness in Kent found voice, and he shouted,

"Marette—Marette——"

He ran on. His knees felt weak. He shouted the name again, and the other voice was silent. Things loomed up out of the mist ahead of him, between him and the glowing windows. Some one—two people—were advancing to meet him, doubtfully, wonderingly. Kent was staggering, but he cried the name again, and this time it was a woman's cry that answered, and one of the two came toward him swift as a flash of light.

Three paces apart they stood, and in that gloom of the after-twilight their burning eyes looked at each other, while for a space their bodies remained stricken in the face of this miracle of a great and merciful God

The dead had risen. By a mighty effort Kent reached out his arms, and Marette swayed to him. When the other man came up, he found them crumpled to their knees on the earth, clasped like children in each other's arms. And as Kent raised his face, he saw that it was Sandy McTrigger who was looking down at him, the man whose life he had saved at Athabasca Landing.

CHAPTER XXV

HOW long it was before his brain cleared, Kent never could have told. It might have been a minute or an hour. Every vital force that was in him had concentrated into a single consciousness—that the dead had come to life, that it was Marette Radisson, the flesh and blood and living warmth of her, he held in his arms. Like the flash of a picture on a screen he had seen McTrigger's face close to him, and then his own head was crushed down again, and if the valley had been filled with the roar of cannon, he would have heard only one sound, a sobbing voice crying over and over again, "Jeems—Jeems—Jeems——"

It was McTrigger, in the beginning of the starlight, who alone looked with clear vision upon the wonder of the thing that was happening. After a little Kent realized that McTrigger was talking, that a hand was on his shoulder, that the voice was both joyous and insistent. He rose to his feet, still holding Marette, her arms clinging to him. Her breath was sobbing and broken. And it was impossible for Kent to speak. He seemed to stumble over the distance between them and the lights, with McTrigger on the other side of Marette. It was McTrigger who opened a door, and they came into a glow of lamplight. It was a great, strange-

looking room they entered. And over the threshold Marette's hands dropped from Kent, and Kent stepped back, so that in the light they faced each other, and in that moment came the marvelous readjustment from shock and disbelief to a glorious certainty.

Again Kent's brain was as clear as the day he faced death at the head of the Chute. And swift as a hot barb a fear leaped into him as his eyes met the eyes of the girl. She was terribly changed. Her face was white with a whiteness that startled him. It was thin. Her eyes were great, slumbering pools of violet, almost black in the lamp glow, and her hair—piled high on her head as he had seen it that first day at Cardigan's—added to the telltale pallor in her cheeks. A hand trembled at her throat, and its thinness frightened him. For a space—a flash of seconds—she looked at him as if possessed of the subconscious fear that he was not Jim Kent, and then slowly her arms opened, and she reached them out to him. She did not smile, she did not cry out, she did not speak his name now; but her arms went round his neck as he took her to him, and her face dropped on his breast. He looked at McTrigger. A woman was standing beside him, a dark-haired, dark-eyed woman, and she had laid a hand on McTrigger's arm. Kent, looking at them, understood.

The woman came to him. "I had better take her now, m'sieu," she said. "Malcolm—will tell you. And a little later,—you may see her again."

Her voice was low and soft. At the sound of it Marette raised her head, and her two hands stole to Kent's cheeks in their old sweet way, and she whispered,

"Kiss me, Jeems—my Jeems—kiss me——"

CHAPTER XXVI

A LITTLE later, clasping hands in the lamp glow, Kent and Sandy McTrigger stood alone in the big room. In their handclasp was the warm thrill of strong men met in an immutable brotherhood. Each had faced death for the other. Yet this thought, subconsciously and forever a part of them, expressed itself only in the grip of their fingers and in the understanding that lay deep in their eyes.

In Kent's face the great question was of Marette. McTrigger saw the fear of it, and slowly he smiled, a glad and yet an anxious smile, as he looked toward the door through which Marette and the older woman had gone.

"Thank God you have come in time!" he said, still holding Kent's hand. "She thought you were dead. And I know, Kent, that it was killing her. We had to watch her at night. Sometimes she would wander out into the valley. She said she was looking for you. It was that way tonight."

Kent gulped hard. "I understand now," he said. "It was the living soul of her that was pulling me here. I——'

He took his pack with its precious contents from his shoulders, listening to McTrigger. They sat down.

What McTrigger was saying seemed of trifling consequence beside the fact that Marette was somewhere beyond the other door, alive, and that he would see her again very soon. He did not see why McTrigger should tell him that the older woman was his wife. Even the fact that a splendid chance had thrown Marette upon a log wedged between two rocks in the Chute, and that this log, breaking away, had carried her to the opposite side of the river miles below, was trivial with the thought that only a door separated them now. But he listened. He heard McTrigger tell how Marette had searched for him those days when he was lost in fever at André Boileau's cabin, how she had given him up for dead, and how in those same days Laselle's brigade had floated down, and she had come north with it. Later he would marvel over these things, but now he listened, and his eyes turned toward the door. It was then that McTrigger drove something home. It was like a shot piercing Kent's brain. McTrigger was speaking quietly of O'Connor. He said:

"But you probably came by way of Fort Simpson, Kent, and O'Connor has told you all this. It was he who brought Marette back home through the Sulphur Country."

"O'Connor!"

Kent sprang to his feet. It took McTrigger but a moment to read the truth in his face.

"Good God, do you mean to tell me you don't know

Kent?" he whispered tensely, rising in front of the other. "Haven't you seen O'Connor? Haven't you come in touch with the Police anywhere within the last year? Don't you know——?"

"I know nothing," breathed Kent.

For a space McTrigger stared at him in amazement.

"I have been in hiding," said Kent. "All this time I have been keeping away from the Police."

McTrigger drew a deep breath. Again his hands gripped Kent's, and his voice was incredulous, filled with a great wonder. "And you have come to her, to her old home, believing that Marette killed Kedsty! It is hard to believe. And yet——" Into his face came suddenly a look of grief, almost of pain, and Kent, following his eyes, saw that he was looking at a big stone fireplace in the end of the room.

"It was O'Connor who worked the thing out last Winter," he said, speaking with an effort. "I must tell you before you see her again. You must understand everything. It will not do to have her tell you. See——"

Kent followed him to the fireplace. From the shelf over the stonework McTrigger took a picture and gave it to him. It was a snapshot, the picture of a bare-headed man standing in the open with the sun shining on him.

A low cry broke from Kent's lips. It was the great, gray ghost of a man he had seen in the lightning flare

that night from the window of his hiding-place in Kedsty's bungalow.

"My brother," said McTrigger chokingly. "I loved him. For forty years we were comrades. And Marette belonged to us, half and half. It was he—who killed—John Barkley." And then, after a moment in which McTrigger fought to speak steadily, he added, "And it was he—my brother—who also killed Inspector Kedsty."

For a matter of seconds there was a dead silence between them. McTrigger looked into the fireplace instead of at Kent. Then he said:

"He killed those men, but he didn't murder them, Kent. It couldn't be called that. It was justice, single-man justice, without going to law. If it wasn't for Marette, I wouldn't tell you about it—not the horrible part of it. I don't like to bring it up in my memory. . . . It happened years ago. I was not married then, but my brother was ten years older than I and had a wife. I think that Marette loves you as Marie loved Donald. And Donald's love was more than that. It was worship. We came into the new mountain country, the three of us, even before the big strikes at Dawson and Bonanza. It was a wild country, a savage country, and there were few women in it, but Marie came with Donald. She was beautiful, with hair and eyes like Marette's. That was the tragedy of it.

"I won't tell you the details. They were terrible. It

happened while Donald and I were out on a hunt. Three men—white men—remember that, Kent; *white men*—came out of the North and stopped at the cabin. When we returned, what we found there drove us mad. Marie died in Donald's arms. And leaving her there, alone, we set out after the white-skinned brutes who had destroyed her. Only a blizzard saved them, Kent. Their trail was fresh when the storm came. Had it held off another two hours, I, too, would have killed.

"From that day Donald and I became man-hunters. We traced the back trail of the three fiends and discovered who they were. Two years later Donald found one of the three on the Yukon, and before he killed him he made him verify the names of the other two. It was a long search after that, Kent. It has covered thirty years. Donald grew old faster than I, and I knew, after a time, that he was strangely mad. He would be gone for months at a time, always searching for the two men. Ten years passed, and then, one day, in the deep of Winter, we came on a cabin home that had been stricken with the plague—the smallpox. It was the home of Pierre Radisson and his wife Andrea. Both were dead. But there was a little child still living, almost a babe in arms. We took her, Donald and I. The child was—Marette."

McTrigger had spoken almost in a monotone. He had not raised his eyes from the ash of the fireplace. But now he looked up suddenly at Kent.

"We worshipped her from the beginning," he said, his voice a bit husky. "I hoped that love for her would save Donald. It did, in a way. But it did not cure his madness, his desire for vengeance. We came farther east. We found this marvelous valley, and gold in the mountains, untouched by other men. We built here, and I hoped even more that the glory of this new world we had discovered would help Donald to forget. I married, and my wife loved Marette. We had a child, and then another, and both died. We loved Marette more than ever after that. Anne, my wife, was the daughter of a missioner and capable of educating Marette up to a certain point. You will find this place filled with all kinds of books, and reading, and music. But the time came when we thought we must send Marette to Montreal. It broke her heart. And then—a long time after——"

McTrigger paused a moment, looking into Kent's eyes. "And then—one day Donald came in from Dawson City, terrible in his madness, and told us that he had found his men. One of them was John Barkley, the rich timber man, and the other was Kedsty, Inspector of Police at Athabasca Landing."

Kent made no effort to speak. His amazement, as McTrigger had gone on, was beyond the expression of words. The night held for him a cumulative shock—the discovery that Marette was not dead, but alive, and now the discovery that he, Jim Kent, was no longer a hunted man, and that it was O'Connor, his

old comrade, who had run the truth down. With dry lips he simply nodded, urging McTrigger to continue

"I knew what would happen if Donald went after Barkley and Kedsty," said the older man. "And it was impossible to hold him back. He was mad, clean mad. There was just one thing for me to do. I left here first, with the intention of warning the two brutes who had killed Donald's wife. I knew, with the evidence in our hands, they could do nothing but make a getaway. No matter how rich or powerful they were, our evidence was complete, and through many years we had kept track of the movements of our witnesses. I tried to explain to Donald that we could send them to prison, but there was but one thought in his poor sick mind—to kill. I was younger and beat him south. And after that I made my fatal mistake. I thought I was far enough ahead of him to get down to the line of rail and back before he arrived. You see, I figured his love for Marette would take him to Montreal first, and I had made up my mind to tell her everything so that she might understand the necessity of holding him if he went to her. I wrote everything to her and told her to remain in Montreal. How she did that, you know. She set out for the North as soon as she received my letter."

McTrigger's shoulders hunched lower. "Well, you know what happened, Kent. Donald got ahead of me, after all. I came the day after Barkley was killed. I took it as a kind fate that the day preceding the kill-

ing I shot a grouse for my dinner, and as the bird was only wounded when I picked it up, I got blood on the sleeves of my coat. I was arrested. Kedsty, every one, was sure they had the real man. And I kept quiet, except to maintain my innocence. I could say nothing that would turn the law on Donald's trail.

"After that, things happened quickly. You, my friend, made your false confession to save one who had done you a poor service years ago. Almost simultaneously with that, Marette had come. She came quietly, in the night, and went straight to Kedsty. She told him everything, showed him the written evidence, telling him this evidence was in the hands of others and would be used if anything happened to her. Her power over him was complete. As the price of her secrecy she demanded my release, and in that black hour your confession gave Kedsty his opportunity.

"He knew you were lying. He knew it was Donald who had killed Barkley. Yet he was willing to sacrifice you to save himself. And Marette remained in his house, waiting and watching for Donald, while I searched for him on the trails. That is why she secretly lived in Kedsty's house. She knew that Donald would come there sooner or later, if I did not find him and get him away. And she was plotting how to save you.

"She loved you, Kent—from that first hour she came to you in the hospital. And she tried to exact your freedom also as an added price for her secrecy.

But Kedsty had become like a cornered tiger. If he freed you, he saw his whole world crumbling under his feet. He, too, went a little mad, I think. He told Marette that he would not free you, that he would go to the hangman first. Then, Kent, came the night of your freedom, and a little later—Donald came to Kedsty's home. It was he whom you saw that night out in the storm. He entered and killed Kedsty.

"Something dragged Marette down to the room that night. She found Kedsty in his chair—dead. Donald was gone. It was then that you found her there. Kent, she loved you—and you will never know how her heart bled when she let you think she had killed Kedsty. She has told me everything. It was her fear for Donald, her desire to keep all possible suspicion from him until he was safe, that compelled her not to confide even in you. Later, when she knew that Donald must be safe, she was going to tell you. And then—you were separated at the Chute." McTrigger paused, and Kent saw him choke back a grief that was still like the fresh cut of a knife in his heart.

"And O'Connor found out all this?"

McTrigger nodded. "Yes. He defied Kedsty's command to go to Fort Simpson and was on his way back to Athabasca Landing when he found my brother. It is strange how all things happened, Kent. But I guess God must have meant it that way. Donald was dying. And in dying, for a space, his old reason returned to him. It was from him, before he died, that

O'Connor learned everything. The story is known everywhere now. It is marvelous that you did not hear——"

There came an interruption, the opening of a door. Anne McTrigger stood looking at them where a little time before she had disappeared with Marette. There was a glad smile in her face. Her dark eyes were glowing with a new happiness. First they rested on McTrigger's face, and then on Kent's.

"Marette is much better," she said in her soft voice. "She is waiting to see you, M'sieu Kent. Will you come now?"

Like one in a dream Kent went toward her. He picked up his pack, for with its precious contents it had become to him like his own flesh and blood. And as the woman led the way and Kent followed her, McTrigger did not move from the fireplace. In a little while Anne McTrigger came back into the room. Her beautiful eyes were aglow. She was smiling softly, and putting her arms about the shoulders of the man at the fireplace, she whispered:

"I have looked at the night through the window, Malcolm. I think that the stars are bigger and brighter than they have been in a long time. And the Watcher seems like a living god up in the sky. Come, please."

She took his hand, and Malcolm went with her. Over their heads burned a glory of stars. The wind came gently up the valley, cool with the freshness of the mountain-tops, sweet with the smell of meadow and

flowers. And when the woman pointed through the glow, Malcolm McTrigger looked up at the Watcher, and for an instant he fancied that he saw what she had seen—something that was life instead of death, a glow of understanding and of triumph in the mighty face of stone above the lace mists of the clouds. For a long time they walked on, and deep in the heart of the woman a voice cried out again and again that the Watcher knew, and that it was a living joy she saw up there, for up to that unmoving and voiceless god of the mountains she had cried and laughed and sung—and even prayed; and with her Marette had also done these things, until at last the pulse and beat of women's souls had given a spirit to a form of rock.

Back in the chateau which Malcolm McTrigger and his brother Donald had built of logs, in a room whose windows faced the Watcher himself, Marette was unveiling the last of mystery for Jim Kent. And this, too, was her hour of triumph. Her lips were red and warm with the flush brought there by Kent's love.

Her face was like the wild roses he had crushed under his feet all that day. For in this hour the world had come to her, and had prostrated itself at her feet. The sacred contents of the pack were in her lap as she leaned back in the great blanketed and pillowed chair that had been her invalid's nest for many days. But it was an invalid's nest no longer. The floods of life were pounding through her body again, and in that hour when Malcolm McTrigger and his wife were

gone, Kent looked upon the miracle of its change. And now Marette gave to him a little packet, and while Kent opened it she raised both hands to her head and unbound her hair so that it fell about her in shining and glorious confusion.

Kent, unwrapping a last bit of tissue-paper, found in his hands a long tress of hair.

"See, Jeems, it has grown fast since I cut it that night."

She leaned a little toward him, parting her hair with slim, white fingers so that he saw again where the hair had been clipped the night of Kedsty's death.

And then she said: "You may keep it always if you want to, Jeems, for I cut it from my head when I left you in the room below, and when you—almost—believed I had killed Kedsty. It was this——"

She gave him another packet, and her lips tightened a little as Kent unwrapped it, and another tress of hair shimmered in the lamp glow.

"That was father Donald's," she whispered.

"It—it was all he had left of Marie, his wife. And that night—when Kedsty died——"

"I understand," cried Kent, stopping her. "He choked Kedsty with it until he was dead. And when I found it around Kedsty's neck—you—you let me think it was yours—to save father Donald!"

She nodded. "Yes, Jeems. If the police had come, they would have thought I was guilty. I planned to let them think so until father Donald was safe. But all

the time I had here in my breast this other tress, which would prove that I was innocent—when the time came. And now, Jeems——"

She smiled at him again and reached out her hands. "Oh, I feel so strong! And I want to take you out now—and show you my valley—Jeems—our valley—yours and mine—in the starlight. Not tomorrow, Jeems. But tonight. Now."

A little later the Watcher looked down on them, even as it had looked down on another man and another woman who had preceded them. But the stars were bigger and brighter, and the white cap of snow that rested on the Watcher's head like a crown caught the faint gleam of a far-away light; and after that, slowly and wonderfully, other snow-crested mountain-tops caught that greeting radiance of the moon. But it was the Watcher who stood out like a mighty god among them all, and when they came to the elbow in the plain, Marette drew Kent down beside her on a great flat rock and laughed softly as she held his hand tightly in her lap.

"Always, from a little child, I have sat and played on this rock, with the Watcher looking, like that," she said in a low voice. "I have grown to love him, Jeems. And I have always believed that he was gazing off there, night and day, into the east, watching for something that was coming to me. Now I know. It was you, Jeems. And, Jeems, when I was away—down there in the big city——"

Her fingers gripped his thumb in their old way, and Kent waited.

"It was the Watcher that made me want to come home most of all," she went on, a bit of tremble in her voice. "Oh, I grew lonely for him, and I could see him in my dreams at night, watching, watching, watching, and sometimes even calling me. Jeems, do you see that hump on his left shoulder, like a great epaulet?"

"Yes, I see," said Kent.

"Beyond that, on a straight line from here—hundreds of miles away—are Dawson City, the Yukon, the big gold country, men, women, civilization. Father Malcolm and father Donald have never found but one trail to this side of the mountains, and I have been over it three times—to Dawson. But the Watcher's back is on those things. Sometimes I imagine it was he who built those great ramparts through which few men come. He wants this valley alone. And so do I. Alone—with you, and with my people."

Kent drew her close in his arms. "When you are stronger," he whispered, "we will go over that hidden trail together, past the Watcher, toward Dawson. For it must be that over there—we will find—a missioner——" He paused.

"Please go on, Jeems."

"And you will be—my wife."

"Yes, yes, Jeems—forever and ever. But, Jeems"—

her arms crept up about his neck—"very soon it will be the first of August."

"Yes——?"

"And in that month there come through the mountains, each year, a man and a woman to visit us—mother Anne's father and mother. And mother Anne's father——"

"Yes——?"

"Is a missioner, Jeems."

And Kent, looking up in this hour of his triumph and joy, believed that in the Watcher's face he caught for an instant the passing radiance of a smile.

THE END

The FLAMING FOREST

The FLAMING FOREST

I

AN hour ago, under the marvelous canopy of the blue northern sky, David Carrigan, Sergeant in His Most Excellent Majesty's Royal Northwest Mounted Police, had hummed softly to himself, and had thanked God that he was alive. He had blessed McVane, superintendent of "N" Division at Athabasca Landing, for detailing him to the mission on which he was bent. He was glad that he was traveling alone, and in the deep forest, and that for many weeks his adventure would carry him deeper and deeper into his beloved north. Making his noonday tea over a fire at the edge of the river, with the green forest crowding like an inundation on three sides of him, he had come to the conclusion—for the hundredth time, perhaps—that it was a nice thing to be alone in the world, for he was on what his comrades at the Landing called a "bad assignment."

"If anything happens to me," Carrigan had said to McVane, "there isn't anybody in particular to notify. I lost out in the matter of family a long time ago."

He was not a man who talked much about himself, even to the superintendent of "N" Division, yet there were a thousand who loved Dave Carrigan, and many who placed their confidences in him. Superintendent McVane had one story which he might have told, but he kept it to himself, instinctively sensing the sacredness of it. Even Carrigan did not know that the one thing which never passed his lips was known to McVane.

Of that, too, he had been thinking an hour ago. It was the thing which, first of all, had driven him into the north. And though it had twisted and disrupted the earth under his feet for a time, it had brought its compensation. For he had come to love the north with a passionate devotion. It was, in a way, his God. It seemed to him that the time had never been when he had lived any other life than this under the open skies. He was thirty-seven now. A bit of a philosopher, as philosophy comes to one in a sun-cleaned and unpolluted air. A good-humored brother of humanity, even when he put manacles on other men's wrists; graying a little over the temples—and a lover of life. Above all else he was that. A lover of life. A worshiper at the shrine of God's Country.

So he sat, that hour ago, deep in the wilderness eighty miles north of Athabasca Landing, congratulating himself on the present conditions of his existence. A hundred and eighty miles farther on was Fort McMurray, and another two hundred beyond that

was Chipewyan, and still beyond that the Mackenzie and its fifteen-hundred-mile trail to the northern sea. He was glad there was no end to this world of his. He was glad there were few people in it. But these people he loved. That hour ago he had looked out on the river as two York boats had forged up against the stream, craft like the long, slim galleys of old, brought over through the Churchill and Clearwater countries from Hudson's Bay. There were eight rowers in each boat. They were singing. Their voices rolled between the walls of the forests. Their naked arms and shoulders glistened in the sun. They rowed like Vikings, and to him they were symbols of the freedom of the world. He had watched them until they were gone up-stream, but it was a long time before the chanting of their voices had died away. And then he had risen from beside his tiny fire, and had stretched himself until his muscles cracked. It was good to feel the blood running red and strong in one's veins at the age of thirty-seven. For Carrigan felt the thrill of these days when strong men were coming out of the north—days when the glory of June hung over the land, when out of the deep wilderness threaded by the Three Rivers came romance and courage and red-blooded men and women of an almost forgotten people to laugh and sing and barter for a time with the outpost guardians of a younger and more progressive world. It was north of Fifty-Four, and the waters of a continent flowed toward the Arctic Sea. Yet soon would the

strawberries be crushing red underfoot; the forest rose was in bloom, scarlet fire-flowers reddened the trail, wild hyacinths and golden-freckled violets played hide-and-seek with the forget-me-nots in the meadows, and the sky was a great splash of velvety blue. It was the north triumphant—at the edge of civilization; the north triumphant, and yet paying its tribute. For at the other end were waiting the royal Upper Ten Thousand and the smart Four Hundred with all the *beau monde* behind them, coveting and demanding that tribute to their sex—the silken furs of a far country, the life's blood and labor of a land infinitely beyond the pale of drawing-rooms and the whims of fashion.

Carrigan had thought of these things that hour ago, as he sat at the edge of the first of the Three Rivers, the great Athabasca. From down the other two, the Slave and the Mackenzie, the fur fleets of the unmapped country had been toiling since the first break-ups of ice. Steadily, week after week, the north had been emptying itself of its picturesque tide of life and voice, of muscle and brawn, of laughter and song—and wealth. Through long months of deep winter, in ten thousand shacks and tepees and cabins, the story of this June had been written as fate had written it each winter for a hundred years or more. A story of the triumph of the fittest. A story of tears, of happiness here and there, of hunger and plenty, of new life and quick death; a story of strong men and strong women, living in the faith of their forefathers, with the best

blood of old England and France still surviving in their veins.

Through those same months of winter, the great captains of trade in the city of Edmonton had been preparing for the coming of the river brigades. The hundred and fifty miles of trail between that last city outpost of civilization and Athabasca Landing, the door that opened into the North, were packed hard by team and dog-sledge and packer bringing up the freight that for another year was to last the forest people of the Three River country—a domain reaching from the Landing to the Arctic Ocean. In competition fought the drivers of Revillon Brothers and Hudson's Bay, of free trader and independent adventurer. Freight that grew more precious with each mile it advanced must reach the beginning of the waterway. It started with the early snows. The tide was at full by midwinter. In temperature that nipped men's lungs it did not cease. There was no let-up in the whip-hands of the masters of trade at Edmonton, Winnipeg, Montreal, and London across the sea. It was not a work of philanthropy. These men cared not whether Jean and Jacqueline and Pierre and Marie were well-fed or hungry, whether they lived or died, so far as humanity was concerned. But Paris, Vienna, London, and the great capitals of the earth must have their furs—and unless that freight went north, there would be no velvety offerings for the white shoulders of the world. Christmas windows two years hence would

be bare. A feminine wail of grief would rise to the skies. For woman must have her furs, and in return for those furs Jean and Jacqueline and Pierre and Marie must have their freight. So the pendulum swung, as it had swung for a century or two, touching, on the one side, luxury, warmth, wealth, and beauty; on the other, cold and hardship, deep snows and open skies—with that precious freight the thing between.

And now, in this year before rail and steamboat, the glory of early summer was at hand, and the wilderness people were coming up to meet the freight. The Three Rivers—the Athabasca, the Slave, and the Mackenzie, all joining in one great two-thousand-mile waterway to the northern sea—were athrill with the wild impulse and beat of life as the forest people lived it. The Great Father had sent in his treaty money, and Cree song and Chipewyan chant joined the age-old melodies of French and half-breed. Countless canoes drove past the slower and mightier scow brigades; huge York boats with two rows of oars heaved up and down like the ancient galleys of Rome; tightly woven cribs of timber, and giant rafts made up of many cribs were ready for their long drift into a timberless country. On this two-thousand-mile waterway a world had gathered. It was the Nile of the northland, and each post and gathering place along its length was turned into a metropolis, half savage, archaic, splendid with the strength of red blood, clear eyes, and souls that read the word of God in wind and tree.

And up and down this mighty waterway of wilderness trade ran the whispering spirit of song, like the voice of a mighty god heard under the stars and in the winds.

But it was an hour ago that David Carrigan had vividly pictured these things to himself close to the big river, and many things may happen in the sixty minutes that follow any given minute in a man's life. That hour ago his one great purpose had been to bring in Black Roger Audemard, alive or dead—Black Roger, the forest fiend who had destroyed half a dozen lives in a blind passion of vengeance nearly fifteen years ago. For ten of those fifteen years it had been thought that Black Roger was dead. But mysterious rumors had lately come out of the North. He was alive. People had seen him. Fact followed rumor. His existence became certainty. The Law took up once more his hazardous trail, and David Carrigan was the messenger it sent.

"Bring him back, alive or dead," were Superintendent McVane's last words.

And now, thinking of that parting injunction, Carrigan grinned, even as the sweat of death dampened his face in the heat of the afternoon sun. For at the end of those sixty minutes that had passed since his midday pot of tea, the grimly, atrociously unexpected had happened, like a thunderbolt out of the azure of the sky.

II

HUDDLED behind a rock which was scarcely larger than his body, groveling in the white, soft sand like a turtle making a nest for its eggs, Carrigan told himself this without any reservation. He was, as he kept repeating to himself for the comfort of his soul, in a deuce of a fix. His head was bare—simply because a bullet had taken his hat away. His blond hair was filled with sand. His face was sweating. But his blue eyes were alight with a grim sort of humor, though he knew that unless the other fellow's ammunition ran out he was going to die.

For the twentieth time in as many minutes he looked about him. He was in the center of a flat area of sand. Fifty feet from him the river murmured gently over yellow bars and a carpet of pebbles. Fifty feet on the opposite side of him was the cool, green wall of the forest. The sunshine playing in it seemed like laughter to him now, a whimsical sort of merriment roused by the sheer effrontery of the joke which fate had inflicted upon him.

Between the river and the balsam and spruce was only the rock behind which he was cringing like a rabbit afraid to take to the open. And his rock was a

mere up-jutting of the solid floor of shale that was under him. The wash sand that covered it like a carpet was not more than four or five inches deep. He could not dig in. There was not enough of it within reach to scrape up as a protection. And his enemy, a hundred yards or so away, was a determined wretch —and the deadliest shot he had ever known.

Three times Carrigan had made experiments to prove this, for he had in mind a sudden rush to the shelter of the timber. Three times he had raised the crown of his hat slightly above the top of the rock, and three times the marksmanship of the other had perforated it with neatness and dispatch. The third bullet had carried his hat a dozen feet away. Whenever he showed a patch of his clothing, a bullet replied with unerring precision. Twice they had drawn blood. And the humor faded out of Carrigan's eyes.

Not long ago he had exulted in the bigness and glory of this country of his, where strong men met hand to hand and eye to eye. There were the other kind in it, the sort that made his profession of man-hunting a thing of reality and danger, but he expected these—forgot them—when the wilderness itself filled his vision. But his present situation was something unlike anything that had ever happened in his previous experience with the outlawed. He had faced dangers. He had fought. There were times when he had almost died. Fanchet, the half-breed who had robbed a dozen wilderness mail sledges, had come nearest to trapping

him and putting him out of business. Fanchet was a desperate man and had few scruples. But even Fanchet—before he was caught—would not have cornered a man with such bloodthirsty unfairness as Carrigan found himself cornered now.

He no longer had a doubt as to what was in the other's mind. It was not to wound and make merely helpless. It was to kill. It was not difficult to prove this. Careful not to expose a part of his arm or shoulder, he drew a white handkerchief from his pocket, fastened it to the end of his rifle, and held the flag of surrender three feet above the rock. And then, with equal caution, he slowly thrust up a flat piece of shale, which at a distance of a hundred yards might appear as his shoulder or even his head. Scarcely was it four inches above the top of the rock before there came the report of a rifle, and the shale was splintered into a hundred bits.

Carrigan lowered his flag and gathered himself in tighter. The accuracy of the other's marksmanship was appalling. He knew that if he exposed himself for an instant to use his own rifle or the heavy automatic in his holster, he would be a dead man before he could press a trigger. And that time, he felt equally sure, would come sooner or later. His muscles were growing cramped. He could not forever double himself up like a four-bladed jackknife behind the altogether inefficient shelter of the rock.

His executioner was hidden in the edge of the tim-

ber, not directly opposite him, but nearly a hundred yards down stream. Twenty times he had wondered why the fiend with the rifle did not creep up through that timber and take a good, open pot-shot at him from the vantage point which lay at the end of a straight line between his rock and the nearest spruce and balsam. From that angle he could not completely shelter himself. But the man a hundred yards below had not moved a foot from his ambush since he had fired his first shot. That had come when Carrigan was crossing the open space of soft, white sand. It had left a burning sensation at his temple—half an inch to the right and it would have killed him. Swift as the shot itself, he dropped behind the one protection at hand, the up-jutting shoulder of shale.

For a quarter of an hour he had been making efforts to wriggle himself free from his bulky shoulder-pack without exposing himself to a *coup-de-grace*. At last he had the thing off. It was a tremendous relief when he thrust it out beside the rock, almost doubling the size of his shelter. Instantly there came the crash of a bullet in it, and then another. He heard the rattle of pans, and wondered if his skillet would be any good after today.

For the first time he could wipe the sweat from his face and stretch himself. And also he could think Carrigan possessed an unalterable faith in the infallibility of the mind. "You can do anything with the mind," was his code. "It is better than a good gun."

Now that he was physically more at ease, he began reassembling his scattered mental faculties. Who was this stranger who was pot-shotting at him with such deadly animosity from the ambush below? Who——

Another crash of lead in tinware and steel put an unpleasant emphasis to the question. It was so close to his head that it made him wince, and now—with a wide area within reach about him—he began scraping up the sand for an added protection. There came a long silence after that third clatter of distress from his cooking utensils. To David Carrigan, even in his hour of deadly peril, there was something about it that for an instant brought back the glow of humor in his eyes. It was hot, swelteringly hot, in that packet of sand with the unclouded sun almost straight overhead. He could have tossed a pebble to where a bright-eyed sandpiper was cocking itself backward and forward, its jerky movements accompanied by friendly little tittering noises. Everything about him seemed friendly. The river rippled and murmured in cooling song just beyond the sandpiper. On the other side the still cooler forest was a paradise of shade and contentment, astir with subdued and hidden life. It was nesting season. He heard the twitter of birds. A tiny, brown wood warbler fluttered out to the end of a silvery birch limb, and it seemed to David that its throat must surely burst with the burden of its song. The little fellow's brown body, scarcely larger than a butternut, was swell-

ing up like a round ball in his effort to vanquish all other song.

"Go to it, old man," chuckled Carrigan. "Go to it!"

The little warbler, that he might have crushed between thumb and forefinger, gave him a lot of courage.

Then the tiny chorister stopped for breath. In that interval Carrigan listened to the wrangling of two vivid-colored Canada jays deeper in the timber. Chronic scolds they were, never without a grouch. They were like some people Carrigan had known, born pessimists, always finding something to complain about, even in their love days.

And these were love days. That was the odd thought that came to Carrigan as he lay half on his face, his fingers slowly and cautiously working a loophole between his shoulder-pack and the rock. They were love days all up and down the big rivers, where men and women sang for joy, and children played, forgetful of the long, hard days of winter. And in forest, plain, and swamp was this spirit of love also triumphant over the land. It was the mating season of all feathered things. In countless nests were the peeps and twitters of new life; mothers of first-born were teaching their children to swim and fly; from end to end of the forest world the little children of the silent places, furred and feathered, clawed and hoofed, were learning the ways of life. Nature's yearly birthday was half-way gone, and the doors of nature's school wide open. And the tiny brown songster at the end of his birch twig pro-

claimed the joy of it again, and challenged all the world to beat him in his adulation.

Carrigan found that he could peer between his pack and the rock to where the other warbler was singing—and where his enemy lay watching for the opportunity to kill. It was taking a chance. If a movement betrayed his loophole, his minutes were numbered. But he had worked cautiously, an inch at a time, and was confident that the beginning of his effort to fight back was, up to the present moment, undiscovered. He believed that he knew about where the ambushed man was concealed. In the edge of a low-hanging mass of balsam was a fallen cedar. From behind the butt of that cedar he was sure the shots had come.

And now, even more cautiously than he had made the tiny opening, he began to work the muzzle of his rifle through the loophole. As he did this he was thinking of Black Roger Audemard. And yet, almost as quickly as suspicion leaped into his mind, he told himself that the thing was impossible. It could not be Black Roger, or one of Black Roger's friends, behind the cedar log. The idea was inconceivable, when he considered how carefully the secret of his mission had been kept at the Landing. He had not even said goodby to his best friends. And because Black Roger had won through all the preceding years, Carrigan was stalking his prey out of uniform. There had been nothing to betray him. Besides, Black Roger Audemard must be at least a thousand miles

north, unless something had tempted him to come up the rivers with the spring brigades. If he used logic at all, there was but one conclusion for him to arrive at. The man in ambush was some rascally half-breed who coveted his outfit and whatever valuables he might have about his person.

A fourth smashing eruption among his comestibles and culinary possessions came to drive home the fact that even that analysis of the situation was absurd. Whoever was behind the rifle fire had small respect for the contents of his pack, and he was surely not in grievous need of a good gun or ammunition. A sticky mess of condensed cream was running over Carrigan's hand. He doubted if there was a whole tin in his kit.

For a few moments he lay quietly on his face after the fourth shot. His eyes were turned toward the river, and on the far side, a quarter of a mile away, three canoes were moving swiftly up the slow current of the stream. The sunlight flashed on their wet sides. The gleam of dripping paddles was like the flutter of silvery birds' wings, and across the water came an unintelligible shout in response to the rifle shot. It occurred to David that he might make a trumpet of his hands and shout back, but the distance was too great for his voice to carry its message for help. Besides, now that he had the added protection of the pack, he felt a certain sense of humiliation at the thought of showing the white feather. A few minutes more, if all went well, and he would settle for the man behind the log.

He continued again the slow operation of worming his rifle barrel between the pack and the rock. The near-sighted little sandpiper had discovered him and seemed interested in the operation. It had come a dozen feet nearer, and was perking its head and see-sawing on its long legs as it watched with inquisitive inspection the unusual manifestation of life behind the rock. Its twittering note had changed to an occasional sharp and querulous cry. Carrigan wanted to wring its neck. That cry told the other fellow that he was still alive and moving.

It seemed an age before his rifle was through, and every moment he expected another shot. He flattened himself out, Indian fashion, and sighted along the barrel. He was positive that his enemy was watching, yet he could make out nothing that looked like a head anywhere along the log. At one end was a clump of deeper foliage. He was sure he saw a sudden slight movement there, and in the thrill of the moment was tempted to send a bullet into the heart of it. But he saved his cartridge. He felt the mighty importance of certainty. If he fired once—and missed—the advantage of his unsuspected loophole would be gone. It would be transformed into a deadly menace. Even as it was, if his enemy's next bullet should enter that way——

He felt the discomfort of the thought, and in spite of himself a tremor of apprehension ran up his spine. He felt an even greater desire to wring the neck of the

inquisitive little sandpiper. The creature had circled round squarely in front of him and stood there tilting its tail and bobbing its head as if its one insane desire was to look down the length of his rifle barrel. The bird was giving him away. If the other fellow was only half as clever as his marksmanship was good——

Suddenly every nerve in Carrigan's body tightened. He was positive that he had caught the outline of a human head and shoulders in the foliage. His finger pressed gently against the trigger of his Winchester. Before he breathed again he would have fired. But a shot from the foliage beat him out by the fraction of a second. In that precious time lost, his enemy's bullet entered the edge of his kit—and came through. He felt the shock of it, and in the infinitesimal space between the physical impact and the mental effect of shock his brain told him the horrible thing had happened. It was his head—his face. It was as if he had plunged them suddenly into hot water, and what was left of his skull was filled with the rushing and roaring of a flood. He staggered up, clutching his face with both hands. The world about him was twisted and black, a dizzily revolving thing—yet his still fighting mental vision pictured clearly for him a monstrous, bulging-eyed sandpiper as big as a house. Then he toppled back on the white sand, his arms flung out limply, his face turned to the ambush wherein his murderer lay.

His body was clear of the rock and the pack, but there came no other shot from the thick clump of balsam. Nor, for a time, was there movement. The wood warbler was cheeping inquiringly at this sudden change in the deportment of his friend behind the shoulder of shale. The sandpiper, a bit startled, had gone back to the edge of the river and was running a race with himself along the wet sand. And the two quarrelsome jays had brought their family squabble to the edge of the timber.

It was their wrangling that roused Carrigan to the fact that he was not dead. It was a thrilling discovery —that and the fact that he made out clearly a patch of sunlight in the sand. He did not move, but opened his eyes wider. He could see the timber. On a straight line with his vision was the thick clump of balsam. And as he looked, the boughs parted and a figure came out. Carrigan drew a deep breath. He found that it did not hurt him. He gripped the fingers of the hand that was under his body, and they closed on the butt of his service automatic. He would win yet, if God gave him life a few minutes longer.

His enemy advanced. As he drew nearer, Carrigan closed his eyes more and more. They must be shut, and he must appear as if dead, when the other came up. Then, when the scoundrel put down his gun, as he naturally would—his chance would be at hand. If a quiver of his eyes betrayed him——

He closed them tight. Dizziness began to creep

over him, and the fire in his brain grew hot again. He heard footsteps, and they stopped in the sand close beside him. Then he heard a human voice. It did not speak in words, but gave utterance to a strange and unnatural cry. With a mighty effort Carrigan assembled his last strength. It seemed to him that he brought himself up quickly, but his movement was slow, painful—the effort of a man who might be dying. The automatic hung limply in his hand, its muzzle pointing to the sand. He looked up, trying to swing into action that mighty weight of his weapon. And then from his own lips, even in his utter physical impotence, fell a cry of wonder and amazement.

His enemy stood there in the sunlight, staring down at him with big, dark eyes that were filled with horror. They were not the eyes of a man. David Carrigan, in this most astounding moment of his life, found himself looking up into the face of a woman.

III

FOR a matter of twenty seconds—even longer it seemed to Carrigan—the life of these two was expressed in a vivid and unforgettable tableau. One half of it David saw—the blue sky, the dazzling sun, the girl in between. The pistol dropped from his limp hand, and the weight of his body tottered on the crook of his under-elbow. Mentally and physically he was on the point of collapse, and yet in those few moments every detail of the picture was painted with a brush of fire in his brain. The girl was bareheaded. Her face was as white as any face he had ever seen, living or dead; her eyes were like pools that had caught the reflection of fire; he saw the sheen of her hair, the poise of her slender body—its shock, stupefaction, horror. He sensed these things even as his brain wobbled dizzily, and the larger part of the picture began to fade out of his vision. But her face remained to the last. It grew clearer, like a cameo framed in an iris—a beautiful, staring, horrified face with shimmering tresses of jet-black hair blowing about it like a veil. He noticed the hair, that was partly undone as if she had been in a struggle of some sort, or had been running fast against the breeze that came up the river.

He fought with himself to hold that picture of her, to utter some word, make some movement. But the power to see and to live died out of him. He sank back with a queer sound in his throat. He did not hear the answering cry from the girl as she flung herself, with a quick little prayer for help, on her knees in the soft, white sand beside him. He felt no movement when she raised his head in her arm and with her bare hand brushed back his sand-littered hair, revealing where the bullet had struck him. He did not know when she ran back to the river.

His first sensation was of a cool and comforting something trickling over his burning temples and his face. It was water. Subconsciously he knew that, and in the same way he began to think. But it was hard to pull his thoughts together. They persisted in hopping about, like a lot of sand-fleas in a dance, and just as he got hold of one and reached for another, the first would slip away from him. He began to get the best of them after a time, and he had an uncontrollable desire to say something. But his eyes and his lips were sealed tight, and to open them, a little army of gnomes came out of the darkness in the back of his head, each of them armed with a lever, and began prying with all their might. After that came the beginning of light and a flash of consciousness.

The girl was working over him. He could feel her and hear her movement. Water was trickling over his face Then he heard a voice, close over him, saying

something in a sobbing monotone which he could not understand.

With a mighty effort he opened his eyes.

"Thank *le bon Dieu,* you live, m'sieu," he heard the voice say, as if coming from a long distance away. "You live, you live——"

"Tryin' to," he mumbled thickly, feeling suddenly a sense of great elation. "Tryin'——"

He wanted to curse the gnomes for deserting him, for as soon as they were gone with their levers, his eyes and his lips shut tight again, or at least he thought they did. But he began to sense things in a curious sort of way. Some one was dragging him. He could feel the grind of sand under his body. There were intervals when the dragging operation paused. And then, after a long time, he seemed to hear more than one voice. There were two—sometimes a murmur of them. And odd visions came to him. He seemed to see the girl with shining black hair and dark eyes, and then swiftly she would change into a girl with hair like blazing gold. This was a different girl. She was not like Pretty Eyes, as his twisted mind called the other. This second vision that he saw was like a radiant bit of the sun, her hair all aflame with the fire of it and her face a different sort of face. He was always glad when she went away and Pretty Eyes came back.

To David Carrigan this interesting experience in his life might have covered an hour, a day, or a month. Or a year for that matter, for he seemed to have had

an indefinite association with Pretty Eyes. He had known her for a long time and very intimately, it seemed. Yet he had no memory of the long fight in the hot sun, or of the river, or of the singing warblers, or of the inquisitive sandpiper that had marked out the line which his enemy's last bullet had traveled. He had entered into a new world in which everything was vague and unreal except that vision of dark hair, dark eyes, and pale, beautiful face. Several times he saw it with marvelous clearness, and each time he drifted away into darkness again with the sound of a voice growing fainter and fainter in his ears.

Then came a time of utter chaos and soundless gloom. He was in a pit, where even his subconscious self was almost dead under a crushing oppression. At last a star began to glimmer in this pit, a star pale and indistinct and a vast distance away. But it crept steadily up through the eternity of darkness, and the nearer it came, the less there was of the blackness of night. From a star it grew into a sun, and with the sun came dawn. In that dawn he heard the singing of a bird, and the bird was just over his head. When Carrigan opened his eyes, and understanding came to him, he found himself under the silver birch that belonged to the wood warbler.

For a space he did not ask himself how he had come there. He was looking at the river and the white strip of sand. Out there were the rock and his dunnage pack. Also his rifle. Instinctively his eyes turned to

the balsam ambush farther down. That, too, was in a blaze of sunlight now. But where he lay, or sat, or stood—he was not sure what he was doing at that moment—it was shady and deliciously cool. The green of the cedar and spruce and balsam was close about him, inset with the silver and gold of the thickly-leaved birch. He discovered that he was bolstered up partly against the trunk of this birch and partly against a spruce sapling. Between these two, where his head rested, was a pile of soft moss freshly torn from the earth. And within reach of him was his own kit pail filled with water.

He moved himself cautiously and raised a hand to his head. His fingers came in contact with a bandage.

For a minute or two after that he sat without moving while his amazed senses seized upon the significance of it all. In the first place he was alive. But even this fact of living was less remarkable than the other things that had happened. He remembered the final moments of the unequal duel. His enemy had got him. And that enemy was a woman! Moreover, after she had blown away a part of his head and had him helpless in the sand, she had—in place of finishing him there—dragged him to this cool nook and tied up his wound. It was hard for him to believe, but the pail of water, the moss behind his shoulders, the bandage, and certain visions that were reforming themselves in his brain convinced him. A woman had shot him. She had worked like the very devil to kill him. And after-

ward she had saved him! He grinned. It was final proof that his mind hadn't been playing tricks on him. No one but a woman would have been quite so unreasonable. A man would have completed the job.

He began to look for her up and down the white strip of sand. And in looking he saw the gray and silver flash of the hard-working sandpiper. He chuckled, for he was exceedingly comfortable, and also exhilaratingly happy to know that the thing was over and he was not dead. If the sandpiper had been a man, he would have called him up to shake hands with him. For if it hadn't been for the bird getting squarely in front of him and giving him away, there might have been a more horrible end to it all. He shuddered as he thought of the mighty effort he had made to fire a shot into the heart of the balsam ambush—and perhaps into the heart of a woman!

He reached for the pail and drank deeply of the water in it. He felt no pain. His dizziness was gone. His mind had grown suddenly clear and alert. The warmth of the water told him almost instantly that it had been taken from the river some time ago. He observed the change in sun and shadows. With the instinct of a man trained to note details, he pulled out his watch. It was almost six o'clock. More than three hours had passed since the sandpiper had got in front of his gun.

He did not attempt to rise to his feet, but scanned with slower and more careful scrutiny the edge of the

forest and the river. He had been mystified while cringing for his life behind the rock, but he was infinitely more so now. Greater desire he had never had than this which thrilled him in these present minutes of his readjustment—desire to look upon the woman again. And then, all at once, there came back to him a mental flash of the other. He remembered, as if something was coming back to him out of a dream, how the whimsical twistings of his sick brain had made him see two faces instead of one. Yet he knew that the first picture of his mysterious assailant, the picture painted in his brain when he had tried to raise his pistol, was the right one. He had seen her dark eyes aglow; he had seen the sunlit sheen of her black hair rippling in the wind; he had seen the white pallor in her face, the slimness of her as she stood over him in horror—he remembered even the clutch of her white hand at her throat. A moment before she had tried to kill him. And then he had looked up and had seen her like that! It must have been some unaccountable trick in his brain that had flooded her hair with golden fire at times.

His eyes followed a furrow in the white sand which led from where he sat bolstered against the tree down to his pack and the rock. It was the trail made by his body when she had dragged him up to the shelter and coolness of the timber. One of his laws of physical care was to keep himself trained down to a hundred and sixty, but he wondered how she had dragged up

even so much as that of dead weight. It had taken a great deal of effort. He could see distinctly three different places in the sand where she had stopped to rest.

Carrigan had earned a reputation as the expert analyst of "N" Division. In delicate matters it was seldom that McVane did not take him into consultation. He possessed an almost uncanny grip on the working processes of a criminal mind, and the first rule he had set down for himself was to regard the acts of omission rather than the one outstanding act of commission. But when he proved to himself that the chief actor in a drama possessed a normal rather than a criminal mind, he found himself in the position of checkmate. It was a thrilling game. And he was frankly puzzled now, until—one after another—he added up the sum total of what had been omitted in this instance of his own personal adventure. Hidden in her ambush, the woman who had shot him had been in both purpose and act an assassin. Her determination had been to kill him. She had disregarded the white flag with which he had pleaded for mercy. Her marksmanship was of fiendish cleverness. Up to her last shot she had been, to all intent and purpose, a murderess.

The change had come when she looked down upon him, bleeding and helpless, in the sand. Undoubtedly she had thought he was dying. But why, when she saw his eyes open a little later, had she cried out her gratitude to God? What had worked the sudden trans-

formation in her? Why had she labored to save the life she had so atrociously coveted a minute before?

If his assailant had been a man, Carrigan would have found an answer. For he was not robbed, and therefore robbery was not a motif. "A case of mistaken identity," he would have told himself. "An error in visual judgment."

But the fact that in his analysis he was dealing with a woman made his answer only partly satisfying. He could not disassociate himself from her eyes—their beauty, their horror, the way they had looked at him. It was as if a sudden revulsion had come over her; as if, looking down upon her bleeding handiwork, the woman's soul in her had revolted, and with that revulsion had come repentance—repentance and pity.

"That," thought Carrigan, "would be just like a woman—and especially a woman with eyes like hers."

This left him but two conclusions to choose from. Either there had been a mistake, and the woman had shown both horror and desire to amend when she discovered it, or a too tender-hearted agent of Black Roger Audemard had waylaid him in the heart of the white strip of sand.

The sun was another hour lower in the sky when Carrigan assured himself in a series of cautious experiments that he was not in a condition to stand upon his feet. In his pack were a number of things he wanted—his blankets, for instance, a steel mirror, and the thermometer in his medical kit. He was beginning

to feel a bit anxious about himself. There were sharp pains back of his eyes. His face was hot, and he was developing an unhealthy appetite for water. It was fever and he knew what fever meant in this sort of thing, when one was alone. He had given up hope of the woman's return. It was not reasonable to expect her to come back after her furious attempt to kill him. She had bandaged him, bolstered him up, placed water beside him, and had then left him to work out the rest of his salvation alone. But why the deuce hadn't she brought up his pack?

On his hands and knees he began to work himself toward it slowly. He found that the movement caused him pain, and that with this pain, if he persisted in movement, there was a synchronous rise of nausea. The two seemed to work in a sort of unity. But his medicine case was important now, and his blankets, and his rifle if he hoped to signal help that might chance to pass on the river. A foot at a time, a yard at a time, he made his way down into the sand. His fingers dug into the footprints of the mysterious gun-woman. He approved of their size. They were small and narrow, scarcely longer than the palm and fingers of his hand—and they were made by shoes instead of moccasins.

It seemed an interminable time to him before he reached his pack. When he got there, a pendulum seemed swinging back and forth inside his head, beating against his skull. He lay down with his pack for

a pillow, intending to rest for a spell. But the minutes added themselves one on top of another. The sun slipped behind clouds banking in the west. It grew cooler, while within him he was consumed by a burning thirst. He could hear the ripple of running water, the laughter of it among pebbles a few yards away. And the river itself became even more desirable than his medicine case, or his blankets, or his rifle. The song of it, inviting and tempting him, blotted thought of the other things out of his mind. And he continued his journey, the swing of the pendulum in his head becoming harder, but the sound of the river growing nearer. At last he came to the wet sand, and fell on his face, and drank.

After this he had no great desire to go back. He rolled himself over, so that his face was turned up to the sky. Under him the wet sand was soft, and it was comfortingly cool. The fire in his head died out. He could hear new sounds in the edge of the forest—evening sounds. Only weak little twitters came from the wood warblers, driven to silence by thickening gloom in the densely canopied balsams and cedars, and frightened by the first low hoots of the owls. There was a crash not far distant, probably a porcupine waddling through brush on his way for a drink; or perhaps it was a thirsty deer, or a bear coming out in the hope of finding a dead fish. Carrigan loved that sort of sound, even when a pendulum was beating back and forth in his head. It was like medicine to him, and

he lay with wide-open eyes, his ears picking up one after another the voices that marked the change from day to night. He heard the cry of a loon, its softer, chuckling note of honeymoon days. From across the river came a cry that was half howl, half bark. Carrigan knew that it was coyote, and not wolf, a coyote whose breed had wandered hundreds of miles north of the prairie country.

The gloom gathered in, and yet it was not darkness as the darkness of night is known a thousand miles south. It was the dusky twilight of day where the sun rises at three o'clock in the morning and still throws its ruddy light in the western sky at nine o'clock at night; where the poplar buds unfold themselves into leaf before one's very eyes; where strawberries are green in the morning and red in the afternoon; where, a little later, one could read newspaper print until midnight by the glow of the sun—and between the rising and the setting of that sun there would be from eighteen to twenty hours of day. It was evening time in the wonderland of the north, a wonderland hard and frozen and ridden by pain and death in winter, but a paradise upon earth in this month of June.

The beauty of it filled Carrigan's soul, even as he lay on his back in the damp sand. Far south of him steam and steel were coming, and the world would soon know that it was easy to grow wheat at the Arctic Circle, that cucumbers grew to half the size of a man's arm, that flowers smothered the land and berries turned it scarlet

and black. He had dreaded these days—days of what he called "the great discovery"—the time when a crowded civilization would at last understand how the fruits of the earth leaped up to the call of twenty hours of sun each day, even though that earth itself was eternally frozen if one went down under its surface four feet with a pick and shovel.

Tonight the gloom came earlier because of the clouds in the west. It was very still. Even the breeze had ceased to come from up the river. And as Carrigan listened, exulting in the thought that the coolness of the wet sand was drawing the fever from him, he heard another sound. At first he thought it was the splashing of a fish. But after that it came again, and still again, and he knew that it was the steady and rhythmic dip of paddles.

A thrill shot through him, and he raised himself to his elbow. Dusk covered the river, and he could not see. But he heard low voices as the paddles dipped. And after a little he knew that one of these was the voice of a woman.

His heart gave a big jump. "She is coming back," he whispered to himself. "She is coming back!"

IV

CARRIGAN'S first impulse, sudden as the thrill that leaped through him, was to cry out to the occupants of the unseen canoe. Words were on his lips, but he forced them back. They could not miss him, could not get beyond the reach of his voice—and he waited. After all, there might be profit in a reasonable degree of caution. He crept back toward his rifle, sensing the fact that movement no longer gave him very great distress. At the same time he lost no sound from the river. The voices were silent, and the dip, dip, dip of paddles was approaching softly and with extreme caution. At last he could barely hear the trickle of them, yet he knew the canoe was coming steadily nearer. There was a suspicious secretiveness in its approach. Perhaps the lady with the beautiful eyes and the glistening hair had changed her mind again and was returning to put an end to him.

The thought sharpened his vision. He saw a thin shadow a little darker than the gloom of the river; it grew into shape; something grated lightly upon sand and pebbles, and then he heard the guarded plash of feet in shallow water and saw some one pulling the canoe up higher. A second figure joined the first

They advanced a few paces and stopped. In a moment a voice called softly,

"M'sieu! M'sieu Carrigan!"

There was an anxious note in the voice, but Carrigan held his tongue. And then he heard the woman say,

"It was here, Bateese! I am sure of it!"

There was more than anxiety in her voice now. Her words trembled with distress. "Bateese—if he is dead—he is up there close to the trees."

"But he isn't dead," said Carrigan, raising himself a little. "He is here, behind the rock again!"

In a moment she had run to where he was lying, his hand clutching the cold barrel of the pistol which he had found in the sand, his white face looking up at her. Again he found himself staring into the glow of her eyes, and in that pale light which precedes the coming of stars and moon the fancy struck him that she was lovelier than in the full radiance of the sun. He heard a throbbing note in her throat. And then she was down on her knees at his side, leaning close over him, her hands groping at his shoulders, her quick breath betraying how swiftly her heart was beating.

"You are not hurt—badly?" she cried.

"I don't know," replied David. "You made a perfect shot. I think a part of my head is gone. At least you've shot away my balance, because I can't stand on my feet!"

Her hand touched his face, remaining there for an instant, and the palm of it pressed his forehead. It

was like the touch of cool velvet, he thought. Then she called to the man named Bateese. He made Carrigan think of a huge chimpanzee as he came near, because of the shortness of his body and the length of his arms. In the half light he might have been a huge animal, a hulking creature of some sort walking upright. Carrigan's fingers closed more tightly on the butt of his automatic. The woman began to talk swiftly in a patois of French and Cree. David caught the gist of it. She was telling Bateese to carry him to the canoe, and to be very careful, because m'sieu was badly hurt. It was his head, she emphasized. Bateese must be careful of his head.

David slipped his pistol into its holster as Bateese bent over him. He tried to smile at the woman to thank her for her solicitude—after having nearly killed him. There was an increasing glow in the night, and he began to see her more plainly. Out on the middle of the river was a silvery bar of light. The moon was coming up, a little pale as yet, but triumphant in the fact that clouds had blotted out the sun an hour before his time. Between this bar of light and himself he saw the head of Bateese. It was a wild, savage-looking head, bound pirate-fashion round the forehead with a huge Hudson's Bay kerchief. Bateese might have been old Jack Ketch himself bending over to give the final twist to a victim's neck. His long arms slipped under David. Gently and without effort he raised him to his feet. And then, as easily as he might have lifted a

child, he trundled him up in his arms and walked off with him over the sand.

Carrigan had not expected this. He was a little shocked and felt also the impropriety of the thing. The idea of being lugged off like a baby was embarrassing, even in the presence of the one who had deliberately put him in his present condition. Bateese did the thing with such beastly ease. It was as if he was no more than a small boy, a runt with no weight whatever, and Bateese was a man. He would have preferred to stagger along on his own feet or creep on his hands and knees, and he grunted as much to Bateese on the way to the canoe. He felt, at the same time, that the situation owed him something more of discussion and explanation. Even now, after half killing him, the woman was taking a rather high-handed advantage of him. She might at least have assured him that she had made a mistake and was sorry. But she did not speak to him again. She said nothing more to Bateese, and when the half-breed deposited him in the midship part of the canoe, facing the bow, she stood back in silence. Then Bateese brought his pack and rifle, and wedged the pack in behind him so that he could sit upright. After that, without pausing to ask permission, he picked up the woman and carried her through the shallow water to the bow, saving her the wetting of her feet.

As she turned to find her paddle her face was toward David, and for a moment she was looking at him.

"Do you mind telling me who you are, and where we are going?" he asked.

"I am Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain," she said. "My brigade is down the river, M'sieu Carrigan."

He was amazed at the promptness of her confession, for as one of the working factors of the long arm of the police he accepted it as that. He had scarcely expected her to divulge her name after the cold-blooded way in which she had attempted to kill him. And she had spoken quite calmly of "my brigade." He had heard of the Boulain Brigade. It was a name associated with Chipewyan, as he remembered it—or Fort McMurray. He was not sure just where the Boulain scows had traded freight with the upper-river craft. Until this year he was positive they had not come as far south as Athabasca Landing. Boulain—Boulain—The name repeated itself over and over in his mind. Bateese shoved off the canoe, and the woman's paddle dipped in and out of the water beginning to shimmer in moonlight. But he could not, for a time, get himself beyond the pounding of that name in his brain. It was not merely that he had heard the name before. There was something significant about it. Something that made him grope back in his memory of things. Boulain! He whispered it to himself, his eyes on the slender figure of the woman ahead of him, swaying gently to the steady sweep of the paddle in her hands. Yet he could think of nothing. A feeling of irritation swept over him, disgust at his own mental impotency

And the dizzying sickness was brewing in his head again.

"I have heard that name—somewhere—before," he said. There was a space of only five or six feet between them, and he spoke with studied distinctness.

"Possibly you have, m'sieu."

Her voice was exquisite, clear as the note of a bird, yet so soft and low that she seemed scarcely to have spoken. And it was, Carrigan thought, criminally evasive—under the circumstances. He wanted her to turn round and say something. He wanted, first of all, to ask her why she had tried to kill him. It was his right to demand an explanation. And it was his duty to get her back to the Landing, where the law would ask an accounting of her. She must know that. There was only one way in which she could have learned his name, and that was by prying into his identification papers while he was unconscious. Therefore she not only knew his name, but also that he was Sergeant Carrigan of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. In spite of all this she was apparently not very deeply concerned. She was not frightened, and she did not appear to be even slightly excited.

He leaned nearer to her, the movement sending a sharp pain between his eyes. It almost drew a cry from him, but he forced himself to speak without betraying it.

"You tried to murder me—and almost succeeded. Haven't you anything to say?"

"Not now, m'sieu—except that it was a mistake.

and I am sorry. But you must not talk. You must remain quiet. I am afraid your skull is fractured."

Afraid his skull was fractured! And she expressed her fear in the casual way she might have spoken of a toothache. He leaned back against his dunnage sack and closed his eyes. Probably she was right. These fits of dizziness and nausea were suspicious. They made him top-heavy and filled him with a desire to crumple up somewhere. He was clear-mindedly conscious of this and of his fight against the weakness. But in those moments when he felt better and his head was clear of pain, he had not seriously thought of a fractured skull If she believed it, why did she not treat him a bit more considerately? Bateese, with that strength of an ox in his arms, had no use for her assistance with the paddle. She might at least have sat facing him, even if she refused to explain matters more definitely.

A mistake, she called it. And she was sorry for him! She had made those statements in a matter-of-fact way, but with a voice that was like music. She had spoken perfect English, but in her words were the inflection and velvety softness of the French blood which must be running red in her veins. And her name was Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain!

With eyes closed, Carrigan called himself an idiot for thinking of these things at the present time. Primarily he was a man-hunter out on important duty, and here was duty right at hand, a thousand miles south of Black Roger Audemard, the wholesale murderer he

was after. He would have sworn on his life that Black Roger had never gone at a killing more deliberately than this same Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain had gone after him behind the rock!

Now that it was all over, and he was alive, she was taking him somewhere as coolly and as unexcitedly as though they were returning from a picnic. Carrigan shut his eyes tighter and wondered if he was thinking straight. He believed he was badly hurt, but he was as strongly convinced that his mind was clear. And he lay quietly with his head against the pack, his eyes closed, waiting for the coolness of the river to drive his nausea away again.

He sensed rather than felt the swift movement of the canoe. There was no perceptible tremor to its progress. The current and a perfect craftsmanship with the paddles were carrying it along at six or seven miles an hour. He heard the rippling of water that at times was almost like the tinkling of tiny bells, and more and more bell-like became that sound as he listened to it. It struck a certain note for him. And to that note another added itself, until in the purling rhythm of the river he caught the murmuring monotone of a name Boulain—Boulain—Boulain. The name became an obsession. It meant something. And he knew what it meant—if he could only whip his memory back into harness again. But that was impossible now. When he tried to concentrate his mental faculties, his head ached terrifically.

He dipped his hand into the water and held it over his eyes. For half an hour after that he did not raise his head. In that time not a word was spoken by Bateese or Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain. For the forest people it was not an hour in which to talk. The moon had risen swiftly, and the stars were out. Where there had been gloom, the world was now a flood of gold and silver light. At first Carrigan allowed this to filter between his fingers; then he opened his eyes. He felt more evenly balanced again.

Straight in front of him was Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain. The curtain of dusk had risen from between them, and she was full in the radiance of the moon. She was no longer paddling, but was looking straight ahead. To Carrigan her figure was exquisitely girlish as he saw it now. She was bareheaded, as he had seen her first, and her hair hung down her back like a shimmering mass of velvety sable in the star-and-moon glow. Something told Carrigan she was going to turn her face in his direction, and he dropped his hand over his eyes again, leaving a space between the fingers. He was right in his guess. She fronted the moon, looking at him closely—rather anxiously, he thought. She even leaned a little toward him that she might see more clearly. Then she turned and resumed her paddling.

Carrigan was a bit elated. Probably she had looked at him a number of times like that during the past half-hour. And she was disturbed. She was worrying about him. The thought of being a murderess was be-

ginning to frighten her. In spite of the beauty of her eyes and hair and the slim witchery of her body he had no sympathy for her. He told himself that he would give a year of his life to have her down at Barracks this minute. He would never forget that three-quarters of an hour behind the rock, not if he lived to be a hundred. And if he did live, she was going to pay, even if she was lovelier than Venus and all the Graces combined. He felt irritated with himself that he should have observed in such a silly way the sable glow of her hair in the moonlight. And her eyes. What the deuce did prettiness matter in the present situation? The sister of Fanchet, the mail robber, was beautiful, but her beauty had failed to save Fanchet. The Law had taken him in spite of the tears in Carmin Fanchet's big black eyes, and in that particular instance he was the Law. And Carmin Fanchet was pretty—deucedly pretty. Even the Old Man's heart had been stirred by her loveliness.

"A shame!" he had said to Carrigan. "A shame!"

But the rascally Fanchet was hung by the neck until he was dead.

Carrigan drew himself up slowly until he was sitting erect. He wondered what Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain would say if he told her about Carmin. But there was a big gulf between the names Fanchet and Boulain. The Fanchets had come from the dance halls of Alaska. They were bad, both of them. At least, so they had judged Carmin Fanchet—along with her brother. And Boulain——

His hand, in dropping to his side, fell upon the butt of his pistol. Neither Bateese nor the girl had thought of disarming him. It was careless of them, unless Bateese was keeping a good eye on him from behind.

A new sort of thrill crept into Carrigan's blood. He began to see where he had made a huge error in not playing his part more cleverly. It was this girl Jeanne who had shot him. It was Jeanne who had stood over him in that last moment when he had made an effort to use his pistol. It was she who had tried to murder him and who had turned faint-hearted when it came to finishing the job. But his knowledge of these things he should have kept from her. Then, when the proper moment came, he would have been in a position to act. Even now it might be possible to cover his blunder. He leaned toward her again, determined to make the effort.

"I want to ask your pardon," he said. "May I?"

His voice startled her. It was as if the stinging tip of a whip-lash had touched her bare neck. He was smiling when she turned. In her face and eyes was a relief which she made no effort to repress.

"You thought I might be dead," he laughed softly "I'm not, Miss Jeanne. I'm very much alive again It was that accursed fever—and I want to ask your pardon! I think—I know—that I accused you o. shooting me. It's impossible. I couldn't think of it—in my clear mind. I am quite sure that I know the rascally half-breed who pot-shotted me like that. And was you who came in time, and frightened him away

and saved my life. Will you forgive me—and accept my gratitude?"

There came into the glowing eyes of the girl a reflection of his own smile. It seemed to him that he saw the corners of her mouth tremble a little before she answered him.

"I am glad you are feeling better, m'sieu."

"And you will forgive me for—for saying such beastly things to you?"

She was lovely when she smiled, and she was smiling at him now. "If you want to be forgiven for lying, yes," she said. "I forgive you that, because it is sometimes your business to lie. It was I who tried to kill you, m'sieu. And you know it."

"But——"

"You must not talk, m'sieu. It is not good for you: Bateese, will you tell m'sieu not to talk?"

Carrigan heard a movement behind him.

"M'sieu, you will stop ze talk or I brak hees head wit' ze paddle in my han'!" came the voice of Bateese close to his shoulder. "Do I mak' ze word plain so m'sieu compren'?"

"I get you, old man," grunted Carrigan. "I get you—both!"

And he leaned back against his dunnage-sack, staring again at the witching slimness of the lovely Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain as she calmly resumed her paddling in the bow of the canoe.

V

IN the few minutes following the efficient and unexpected warning of Bateese an entirely new element of interest entered into the situation for David Carrigan. He had more than once assured himself that he had made a success of his profession of man-hunting not because he was brighter than the other fellow, but largely because he possessed a sense of humor and no vanities to prick. He was in the game because he loved the adventure of it. He was loyal to his duty, but he was not a worshipper of the law, nor did he covet the small monthly stipend of dollars and cents that came of his allegiance to it. As a member of the Scarlet Police, and especially of "N" Division, he felt the pulse and thrill of life as he loved to live it. And the greatest of all thrills came when he was after a man as clever as himself, or cleverer.

This time it was a woman—or a girl! He had not yet made up his mind which she was. Her voice, low and musical, her poise, and the tranquil and unexcitable loveliness of her face had made him, at first, register her as a woman. Yet as he looked at the slim girlishness of her figure in the bow of the canoe, accentuated by the soft sheen of her partly unbraided

hair, he wondered if she were eighteen or thirty. It would take the clear light of day to tell him. But whether a girl or a woman, she had handled him so cleverly that the unpleasantness of his earlier experience began to give way slowly to an admiration for her capability.

He wondered what the superintendent of "N" Division would say if he could see Black Roger Audemard's latest trailer propped up here in the center of the canoe, the prisoner of a velvety-haired but dangerously efficient bit of feminine loveliness—and a bull-necked, chimpanzee-armed half-breed!

Bateese had confirmed the suspicion that he was a prisoner, even though this mysterious pair were bent on saving his life. Why it was their desire to keep life in him when only a few hours ago one of them had tried to kill him was a question which only the future could answer. He did not bother himself with that problem now. The present was altogether too interesting, and there was but little doubt that other developments equally important were close at hand. The attitude of both Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain and her piratical-looking henchman was sufficient evidence of that. Bateese had threatened to knock his head off, and he could have sworn that the girl—or woman—had smiled her approbation of the threat. Yet he held no grudge against Bateese. An odd sort of liking for the man began to possess him, just as he found himself powerless to resist an ingrowing admiration for

Marie-Anne. The existence of Black Roger Audemard became with him a sort of indefinite reality. Black Roger was a long way off. Marie-Anne and Bateese were very near. He began thinking of her as Marie-Anne. He liked the name. It was the Boulain part of it that worked in him with an irritating insistence.

For the first time since the canoe journey had begun, he looked beyond the darkly glowing head and the slender figure in the bow. It was a splendid night. Ahead of him the river was like a rippling sheet of molten silver. On both sides, a quarter of a mile apart, rose the walls of the forest, like low-hung, oriental tapestries. The sky seemed near, loaded with stars, and the moon, rising with almost perceptible movement toward the zenith, had changed from red to a mellow gold. Carrigan's soul always rose to this glory of the northern light. Youth and vigor, he told himself, must always exist under those unpolluted lights of the upper worlds, the unspeaking things which had told him more than he had ever learned from the mouths of other men. They stood for his religion, his faith, his belief in the existence of things greater than the insignificant spark which animated his own body. He appreciated them most when there was stillness. And tonight it was still. It was so quiet that the trickling of the paddles was like subdued music. From the forest there came no sound. Yet he knew there was life there, wide-eyed, questing life, life that moved on velvety wing and padded foot, just as he and Marie-

Anne and the half-breed Bateese were moving in the canoe. To have called out in this hour would have taken an effort, for a supreme and invisible Hand seemed to have commanded stillness upon the earth.

And then there came droning upon his ears a break in the stillness, and as he listened, the shores closed slowly in, narrowing the channel until he saw giant masses of gray rock replacing the thick verdure of balsam, spruce, and cedar. The moaning grew louder, and the rocks climbed skyward until they hung in great cliffs. There could be but one meaning to this sudden change. They were close to *le Saint-Esprit Rapide*—the Holy Ghost Rapids. Carrigan was astonished. That day at noon he had believed the Holy Ghost to be twenty or thirty miles below him. Now they were at its mouth, and he saw that Bateese and Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain were quietly and unexcitedly preparing to run that vicious stretch of water. Unconsciously he gripped the gunwales of the canoe with both hands as the sound of the rapids grew into low and sullen thunder. In the moonlight ahead he could see the rock walls closing in until the channel was crushed between two precipitous ramparts, and the moon and stars, sending their glow between those walls, lighted up a frothing path of water that made Carrigan hold his breath. He would have portaged this place even in broad day.

He looked at the girl in the bow. The slender figure was a little more erect, the glowing head held a little

higher. In those moments he would have liked to see her face, the wonderful something that must be in her eyes as she rode fearlessly into the teeth of the menace ahead. For he could see that she was not afraid, that she was facing this thing with a sort of exultation, that there was something about it which thrilled her until every drop of blood in her body was racing with the impetus of the stream itself. Eddies of wind puffing out from between the chasm walls tossed her loose hair about her back in a glistening veil. He saw a long strand of it trailing over the edge of the canoe into the water. It made him shiver, and he wanted to cry out to Bateese that he was a fool for risking her life like this. He forgot that he was the one helpless individual in the canoe, and that an upset would mean the end for him, while Bateese and his companion might still fight on. His thought and his vision were focused on the girl—and what lay straight ahead. A mass of froth, like a windrow of snow, rose up before them, and the canoe plunged into it with the swiftness of a shot. It spattered in his face, and blinded him for an instant. Then they were out of it, and he fancied he heard a note of laughter from the girl in the bow. In the next breath he called himself a fool for imagining that. For the run was dead ahead, and the girl became vibrant with life, her paddle flashing in and out, while from her lips came sharp, clear cries which brought from Bateese frog-like bellows of response. The walls shot past; inundations rose and plunged under them; black

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And then there came droning upon his ears a break in the stillness, and as he listened, the shores closed slowly in, narrowing the channel until he saw giant masses of gray rock replacing the thick verdure of balsam, spruce, and cedar. The moaning grew louder, and the rocks climbed skyward until they hung in great cliffs. There could be but one meaning to this sudden change. They were close to *le Saint-Esprit Rapide*—the Holy Ghost Rapids. Carrigan was astonished. That day at noon he had believed the Holy Ghost to be twenty or thirty miles below him. Now they were at its mouth, and he saw that Bateese and Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain were quietly and unexcitedly preparing to run that vicious stretch of water. Unconsciously he gripped the gunwales of the canoe with both hands as the sound of the rapids grew into low and sullen thunder. In the moonlight ahead he could see the rock walls closing in until the channel was crushed between two precipitous ramparts, and the moon and stars, sending their glow between those walls, lighted up a frothing path of water that made Carrigan hold his breath. He would have portaged this place even in broad day.

He looked at the girl in the bow. The slender figure was a little more erect, the glowing head held a little

higher. In those moments he would have liked to see her face, the wonderful something that must be in her eyes as she rode fearlessly into the teeth of the menace ahead. For he could see that she was not afraid, that she was facing this thing with a sort of exultation, that there was something about it which thrilled her until every drop of blood in her body was racing with the impetus of the stream itself. Eddies of wind puffing out from between the chasm walls tossed her loose hair about her back in a glistening veil. He saw a long strand of it trailing over the edge of the canoe into the water. It made him shiver, and he wanted to cry out to Bateese that he was a fool for risking her life like this. He forgot that he was the one helpless individual in the canoe, and that an upset would mean the end for him, while Bateese and his companion might still fight on. His thought and his vision were focused on the girl—and what lay straight ahead. A mass of froth, like a windrow of snow, rose up before them, and the canoe plunged into it with the swiftness of a shot. It spattered in his face, and blinded him for an instant. Then they were out of it, and he fancied he heard a note of laughter from the girl in the bow. In the next breath he called himself a fool for imagining that. For the run was dead ahead, and the girl became vibrant with life, her paddle flashing in and out, while from her lips came sharp, clear cries which brought from Bateese frog-like bellows of response. The walls shot past; inundations rose and plunged under them; black

rocks whipped with caps of foam raced up-stream with the speed of living things; the roar became a drowning voice, and then—as if outreached by the wings of a swifter thing—dropped suddenly behind them. Smoother water lay ahead. The channel broadened. Moonlight filled it with a clearer radiance, and Carrigan saw the girl's hair glistening wet, and her arms dripping.

For the first time he turned about and faced Bateese. The half-breed was grinning like a Cheshire cat!

"You're a confoundedly queer pair!" grunted Carrigan, and he turned about again to find Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain as unconcerned as though running the Holy Ghost Rapids in the glow of the moon was nothing more than a matter of play.

It was impossible for him to keep his heart from beating a little faster as he watched her, even though he was trying to regard her in a most professional sort of way. He reminded himself that she was an iniquitous little Jezebel who had almost murdered him. Carmin Fanchet had been like her, an *ame damnée*—a fallen angel—but his business was not sympathy in such matters as these. At the same time he could not resist the lure of both her audacity and her courage, and he found himself all at once asking himself the amazing question as to what her relationship might be to Bateese. It occurred to him rather unpleasantly that there had been something distinctly proprietary in the way the half-breed had picked her up on the sand, and

that Bateese had shown no hesitation a little later in threatening to knock his head off unless he stopped talking to her. He wondered if Bateese was a Boulain.

The two or three minutes of excitement in the boiling waters of the Holy Ghost had acted like medicine on Carrigan. It seemed to him that something had given way in his head, relieving him of an oppression that had been like an iron hoop drawn tightly about his skull. He did not want Bateese to suspect this change in him, and he slouched lower against the dunnage-pack with his eyes still on the girl. He was finding it increasingly difficult to keep from looking at her. She had resumed her paddling, and Bateese was putting mighty efforts in his strokes now, so that the narrow, birchbark canoe shot like an arrow with the down-sweeping current of the river. A few hundred yards below was a twist in the channel, and as the canoe rounded this, taking the shoreward curve with dizzying swiftness, a wide, still straight-water lay ahead. And far down this Carrigan saw the glow of fires.

The forest had drawn back from the river, leaving in its place a broken tundra of rock and shale and a wide strip of black sand along the edge of the stream itself. Carrigan knew what it was—an upheaval of the tar-sand country so common still farther north, the beginning of that treasure of the earth which would some day make the top of the American continent one of the Eldorados of the world. The fires drew nearer, and suddenly the still night was broken by the wild

chanting of men. David heard behind him a choking note in the throat of Bateese. A soft word came from the lips of the girl, and it seemed to Carrigan that her head was held higher in the moon glow. The chant increased in volume, a rhythmic, throbbing, savage music that for a hundred and fifty years had come from the throats of men along the Three Rivers. It thrilled Carrigan as they bore down upon it. It was not song as civilization would have counted song. It was like an explosion, an exultation of human voice unchained, ebullient with the love of life, savage in its good-humor. It was *le gaité de coeur* of the rivermen, who thought and sang as their forefathers did in the days of Radisson and good Prince Rupert; it was their merriment, their exhilaration, their freedom and optimism, reaching up to the farthest stars. In that song men were straining their vocal muscles, shouting to beat out their nearest neighbor, bellowing like bulls in a frenzy of sudden fun. And then, as suddenly as it had risen in the night, the clamor of voices died away. A single shout came up the river. Carrigan thought he heard a low rumble of laughter. A tin pan banged against another. A dog howled. The flat of an oar played a tattoo for a moment on the bottom of a boat. Then one last yell from a single throat—and the night was silent again.

And that was the Boulain Brigade—singing at this hour of the night, when men should have been sleeping if they expected to be up with the sun. Carrigan

stared ahead. Shortly his adventure would take a new twist. Something was bound to happen when they got ashore. The peculiar glow of the fires had puzzled him. Now he began to understand. Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain's men were camped in the edge of the tar-sands and had lighted a number of natural gas-jets that came up out of the earth. Many times he had seen fires like these burning up and down the Three Rivers. He had lighted fires of his own; he had cooked over them and had afterward had the fun and excitement of extinguishing them with pails of water. But he had never seen anything quite like this that was unfolding itself before his eyes now. There were seven of the fires over an area of half an acre—spouts of yellowish flame burning like giant torches ten or fifteen feet in the air. And between them he very soon made out great bustle and activity. Many figures were moving about. They looked like dwarfs at first, gnomes at play in a little world made out of witchcraft. But Bateese was sending the canoe nearer with powerful strokes, and the figures grew taller, and the spouts of flame higher. Then he knew what was happening. The Boulain men were taking advantage of the cool hours of the night and were tarring up.

He could smell the tar, and he could see the big York boats drawn up in the circle of yellowish light. There were half a dozen of them, and men stripped to the waist were smearing the bottoms of the boats with boiling tar and pitch. In the center was a big, black

way toward it. He passed between chairs. Near the piano was another door, and a wide divan of the same soft, green upholstery. Looking back, he saw that what he had been lying upon was another divan. And close to this were book-shelves, and a table on which were magazines and papers and a woman's work-basket, and in the workbasket—sound asleep—a cat!

And then, over the table and the sleeping cat, his eyes rested upon a triangular banner fastened to the wall. In white against a background of black was a mighty polar bear holding at bay a horde of Arctic wolves. And suddenly the thing he had been fighting to recall came to Carrigan—the great bear—the fighting wolves —the crest of St. Pierre Boulain!

He took a quick step toward the table—then caught at the back of a chair. Confound his head! Or was it the big bateau rocking under his feet? The cat seemed to be turning round in its basket. There were half a dozen banners instead of one; the lamp was shaking in its bracket; the floor was tilting, everything was becoming hideously contorted and out of place. A shroud of darkness gathered about him, and through that darkness Carrigan staggered blindly toward the divan. He reached it just in time to fall upon it like a dead man.

VI

FOR what seemed to be an interminable time after the final breakdown of his physical strength David Carrigan lived in a black world where a horde of unseen little devils were shooting red-hot arrows into his brain. He did not sense the fact of human presence; nor that the divan had been changed into a bed and the four lamps lighted, and that wrinkled, brown hands with talon-like fingers were performing a miracle of wilderness surgery upon him. He did not see the age-old face of Nepapinas—"The Wandering Bolt of Lightning"—as the bent and tottering Cree called upon all his eighty years of experience to bring him back to life. And he did not see Bateese, stolid-faced, silent, nor the dead-white face and wide-open, staring eyes of Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain as her slim, white fingers worked with the old medicine man's. He was in a gulf of blackness that writhed with the spirits of torment. He fought them and cried out against them, and his fighting and his cries brought the look of death itself into the eyes of the girl who was over him. He did not hear her voice nor feel the soothing of her hands, nor the powerful grip of Bateese as he held him when the critical moments came. And Nepapinas, like a

machine that had looked upon death a thousand times, gave no rest to his claw-like fingers until the work was done—and it was then that something came to drive the arrow-shooting devils out of the darkness that was smothering Carrigan.

After that Carrigan lived through an eternity of unrest, a life in which he seemed powerless and yet was always struggling for supremacy over things that were holding him down. There were lapses in it, like the hours of oblivion that come with sleep, and there were other times when he seemed keenly alive, yet unable to move or act. The darkness gave way to flashes of light, and in these flashes he began to see things, curiously twisted, fleeting, and yet fighting themselves insistently upon his senses. He was back in the hot sand again, and this time he heard the voices of Jeanne Marie-Anne and Golden-Hair, and Golden-Hair flaunted a banner in his face, a triangular pennon of black on which a huge bear was fighting white Arctic wolves, and then she would run away from him, crying out—"St. Pierre Boulain—St. Pierre Boulain—" and the last he could see of her was her hair flaming like fire in the sun. But it was always the other—the dark hair and dark eyes—that came to him when the little devils returned to assault him with their arrows. From somewhere she would come out of darkness and frighten them away. He could hear her voice like a whisper in his ears, and the touch of her hands comforted him and quieted his pain. After a time he grew

to be afraid when the darkness swallowed her up, and in that darkness he would call for her, and always he heard her voice in answer.

Then came a long oblivion. He floated through cool space away from the imps of torment; his bed was of downy clouds, and on these clouds he drifted with a great shining river under him; and at last the cloud he was in began to shape itself into walls and on these walls were pictures, and a window through which the sun was shining, and a black pennon—and he heard a soft, wonderful music that seemed to come to him faintly from another world. Other creatures were at work in his brain now. They were building up and putting together the loose ends of things. Carrigan became one of them, working so hard that frequently a pair of dark eyes came out of the dawning of things to stop him, and quieting hands and a voice soothed him to rest. The hands and the voice became very intimate. He missed them when they were not near, especially the hands, and he was always groping for them to make sure they had not gone away.

Only once after the floating cloud transformed itself into the walls of the bateau cabin did the chaotic darkness of the sands fully possess him again. In that darkness he heard a voice. It was not the voice of Golden-Hair, or of Bateese, or of Jeanne Marie-Anne. It was close to his ears. And in that darkness that smothered him there was something terrible about it as it droned slowly the words—"*Has-any-one-seen-Black-Roger-*

Audemard?" He tried to answer, to call back to it, and the voice came again, repeating the words, emotionless, hollow, as if echoing up out of a grave. And still harder he struggled to reply to it, to say that he was David Carrigan, and that he was out on the trail of Black Roger Audemard, and that Black Roger was far north. And suddenly it seemed to him that the voice changed into the flesh and blood of Black Roger himself, though he could not see in the darkness—and he reached out, gripping fiercely at the warm substance of flesh, until he heard another voice, the voice of Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain, entreating him to let his victim go. It was this time that his eyes shot open, wide and seeing, and straight over him was the face of Jeanne Marie-Anne, nearer him than it had been even in the visionings of his feverish mind. His fingers were clutching her shoulders, gripping like steel hooks.

"M'sieu—M'sieu David!" she was crying.

For a moment he stared; then his hands and fingers relaxed, and his arms dropped limply. "Pardon—I—I was dreaming," he struggled weakly. "I thought——"

He had seen the pain in her face. Now, changing swiftly, it lighted up with relief and gladness. His vision, cleared by long darkness, saw the change come in an instant like a flash of sunshine. And then—so near that he could have touched her—she was smiling down into his eyes. He smiled back. It took an effort, for his face felt stiff and unnatural.

"I was dreaming—of a man—named Roger Audemard," he continued to apologize. "Did I—hurt you?"

The smile on her lips was gone as swiftly as it had come. "A little, m'sieu. I am glad you are better. You have been very sick."

He raised a hand to his face. The bandage was there, and also a stubble of beard on his cheeks. He was puzzled. This morning he had fastened his steel mirror to the side of a tree and shaved.

"It was three days ago you were hurt," she said quietly. "This is the afternoon of the third day. You have been in a great fever. Nepapinas, my Indian doctor, saved your life. You must lie quietly now. You have been talking a great deal."

"About—Black Roger?" he said.

She nodded.

"And—Golden-Hair?"

"Yes, of Golden-Hair."

"And—some one else—with dark hair—and dark eyes——"

"It may be, m'sieu."

"And of little devils with bows and arrows, and of polar bears, and white wolves, and of a great lord of the north who calls himself St. Pierre Boulain?"

"Yes, of all those."

"Then I haven't anything more to tell you," grunted David. "I guess I've told you all I know. You shot me, back there. And here I am. What are you going to do next?"

"Call Bateese," she answered promptly, and she rose swiftly from beside him and moved toward the door.

He made no effort to call her back. His wits were working slowly, readjusting themselves after a carnival in chaos, and he scarcely sensed that she was gone until the cabin door closed behind her. Then again he raised a hand to his face and felt his beard. Three days! He turned his head so that he could take in the length of the cabin. It was filled with subdued sunlight now, a western sun that glowed softly, giving depth and richness to the colors on the floor and walls, lighting up the piano keys, suffusing the pictures with a warmth of life. David's eyes traveled slowly to his own feet. The divan had been opened and transformed into a bed. He was undressed. He had on somebody's white nightgown. And there was a big bunch of wild roses on the table where three days ago the cat had been sleeping in the work-basket. His head cleared swiftly, and he raised himself a little on one elbow, with extreme caution, and listened. The big bateau was not moving. It was still tied up, but he could hear no voices out where the tar-sands were.

He dropped back on his pillow, and his eyes rested on the black pennon. His blood stirred again as he looked at the white bear and the fighting wolves. Wherever men rode the waters of the Three Rivers that pennon was known. Yet it was not common. Seldom was it seen, and never had it come south of Chipewyan. Many things came to Carrigan now, things that

he had heard at the Landing and up and down the rivers. Once he had read the tail-end of a report the Superintendent of "N" Division had sent in to headquarters.

"We do not know this St. Pierre. Few men have seen him out of his own country, the far headwaters of the Yellowknife, where he rules like a great overlord. Both the Yellowknives and the Dog Ribs call him *Kicheoo Kimow,* or King, and the same rumors say there is never starvation or plague in his regions; and it is fact that neither the Hudson's Bay nor Revillon Brothers in their cleverest generalship and trade have been able to uproot his almost dynastic jurisdiction. The Police have had no reason to investigate or interfere."

At least that was the gist of what Carrigan had read in McVane's report. But he had never associated it with the name of Boulain. It was of St. Pierre that he had heard stories, St. Pierre and his black pennon with its white bear and fighting wolves. And so—it was St. Pierre *Boulain!*

He closed his eyes and thought of the long winter weeks he had passed at Hay River Post, watching for Fanchet, the mail robber. It was there he had heard most about this St. Pierre, and yet no one he had talked with had ever seen him; no one knew whether he was old or young, a pigmy or a giant. Some stories said that he was strong, that he could twist a gun-barrel double in his hands; others said that he was old, very

old, so that he never set forth with his brigades that brought down each year a treasure of furs to be exchanged for freight. And never did a Dog Rib or a Yellowknife open his mouth about *Kicheoo Kimow* St. Pierre, the master of their unmapped domains. In that great country north and west of the Great Slave he remained an enigma and a sphinx. If he ever came out with his brigades, he did not disclose his identity, so that if one saw a fleet of boats or canoes with the St. Pierre pennon, one had to make his own guess whether St. Pierre himself was there or not. But these things were known—that the keenest, quickest, and strongest men in the northland ran the St. Pierre brigades, that they brought out the richest cargoes of furs, and that they carried back with them into the secret fastnesses of their wilderness the greatest cargoes of freight that treasure could buy. So much the name St. Pierre dragged out of Carrigan's memory. It came to him now why the name "Boulain" had pounded so insistently in his brain. He had seen this pennon with its white bear and fighting wolves only once before, and that had been over a Boulain scow at Chipewyan. But his memory had lost its grip on that incident while retaining vividly its hold on the stories and rumors of the mystery-man, St. Pierre.

Carrigan pulled himself a little higher on his pillow and with a new interest scanned the cabin. He had never heard of Boulain women. Yet here was the proof of their existence and of the greatness that ran

in the red blood of their veins. The history of the great northland, hidden in the dust-dry tomes and guarded documents of the great company, had always been of absorbing interest to him. He wondered why it was that the outside world knew so little about it and believed so little of what it heard. A long time ago he had penned an article telling briefly the story of this half of a great continent in which for two hundred years romance and tragedy and strife for mastery had gone on in a way to thrill the hearts of men. He had told of huge forts with thirty-foot stone bastions, of fierce wars, of great warships that had fired their broadsides in battle in the ice-filled waters of Hudson's Bay. He had described the coming into this northern world of thousands and tens of thousands of the bravest and best-blooded men of England and France, and how these thousands had continued to come, bringing with them the names of kings, of princes, and of great lords, until out of the savagery of the north rose an aristocracy of race built up of the strongest men of the earth. And these men of later days he had called Lords of the North—men who had held power of life and death in the hollow of their hands until the great company yielded up its suzerainty to the Government of the Dominion in 1870; men who were kings in their domains, whose word was law, who were more powerful in their wilderness castles than their mistress over the sea, the Queen of Britain.

And Carrigan, after writing of these things, had

stuffed his manuscript away in the bottom of his chest at barracks, for he believed that it was not in his power to do justice to the people of this wilderness world that he loved. The powerful old lords were gone. Like dethroned monarchs, stripped to the level of other men, they lived in the memories of what had been. Their might now lay in trade. No more could they set out to wage war upon their rivals with powder and ball. Keen wit, swift dogs, and the politics of barter had taken the place of deadlier things. *Le facteur* could no longer slay or command that others be slain. A mightier hand than his now ruled the destinies of the northern people—the hand of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police.

It was this thought, the thought that Law and one of the powerful forces of the wilderness had met in this cabin of the big bateau, that came to Carrigan as he drew himself still higher against his pillow. A greater thrill possessed him than the thrill of his hunt for Black Roger Audemard. Black Roger was a murderer, a wholesale murderer and a fiend, a Moloch for whom there could be no pity. Of all men the Law wanted Black Roger most, and he, David Carrigan, was the chosen one to consummate its desire. Yet in spite of that he felt upon him the strange unrest of a greater adventure than the quest for Black Roger. It was like an impending thing that could not be seen, urging him, rousing his faculties from the slough into which they had fallen because of his wound and sick-

ness. It was, after all, the most vital of all things, a matter of his own life. Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain had tried to kill him deliberately, with malice and intent. That she had saved him afterward only added to the necessity of an explanation, and he was determined that he would have that explanation and settle the present matter before he allowed another thought of Black Roger to enter his head.

This resolution reiterated itself in his mind as the machine-like voice of duty. He was not thinking of the Law, and yet the consciousness of his accountability to that Law kept repeating itself. In the very face of it Carrigan knew that something besides the moral obligation of the thing was urging him, something that was becoming deeply and dangerously personal. At least he tried to think of it as dangerous. And that danger was his unbecoming interest in the girl herself. It was an interest distinctly removed from any ethical code that might have governed him in his experience with Carmin Fanchet, for instance. Comparatively, if they had stood together, Carmin would have been the lovelier. But he would have looked longer at Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain.

He conceded the point, smiling a bit grimly as he continued to study that part of the cabin which he could see from his pillow. He had lost interest—temporarily at least—in Black Roger Audemard. Not long ago the one question to which, above all others, he had desired an answer was, why had Jeanne Marie-

Anne Boulain worked so desperately to kill him and so hard to save him afterward? Now, as he looked about him, the question which repeated itself insistently was, what relationship did she bear to this mysterious lord of the north, St. Pierre?

Undoubtedly she was his daughter, for whom St. Pierre had built this luxurious barge of state. A fierce-blooded offspring, he thought, one like Cleopatra herself, not afraid to kill—and equally quick to make amends when there was a mistake.

There came the quiet opening of the cabin door to break in upon his thought. He hoped it was Jeanne Marie-Anne returning to him. It was Nepapinas. The old Indian stood over him for a moment and put a cold, claw-like hand to his forehead. He grunted and nodded his head, his little sunken eyes gleaming with satisfaction. Then he put his hands under David's arms and lifted him until he was sitting upright, with three or four pillows at his back.

"Thanks," said Carrigan. "That makes me feel better. And—if you don't mind—my last lunch was three days ago, boiled prunes and a piece of bannock——"

"I have brought you something to eat, M'sieu David," broke in a soft voice behind him.

Nepapinas slipped away, and Jeanne Marie-Anne stood in his place. David stared up at her, speechless. He heard the door close behind the old Indian. Then Jeanne Marie-Anne drew up a chair, so that for

the first time he could see her clear eyes with the light of day full upon her.

He forgot that a few days ago she had been his deadliest enemy. He forgot the existence of a man named Black Roger Audemard. Her slimness was as it had pictured itself to him in the hot sands. Her hair was as he had seen it there. It was coiled upon her head like ropes of spun silk, jet-black, glowing softly. But it was her eyes he stared at, and so fixed was his look that the red lips trembled a bit on the verge of a smile. She was not embarrassed. There was no color in the clear whiteness of her skin, except that redness of her lips.

"I thought you had black eyes," he said bluntly. "I'm glad you haven't. I don't like them. Yours are as brown as—as——"

"Please, m'sieu," she interrupted him, sitting down close beside him. "Will you eat—now?"

A spoon was at his mouth, and he was forced to take it in or have its contents spilled over him. The spoon continued to move quickly between the bowl and his mouth. He was robbed of speech. And the girl's eyes, as surely as he was alive, were beginning to laugh at him. They were a wonderful brown, with little, golden specks in them, like the freckles he had seen in wood-violets. Her lips parted. Between their bewitching redness he saw the gleam of her white teeth. In a crowd, with her glorious hair covered and her eyes looking straight ahead, one would not have picked her

out. But close, like this, with her eyes smiling at him, she was adorable.

Something of Carrigan's thoughts must have shown in his face, for suddenly the girl's lips tightened a little, and the warmth went out of her eyes, leaving them cold and distant. He finished the soup, and she rose again to her feet.

"Please don't go," he said. "If you do, I think I shall get up and follow. I am quite sure I am entitled to a little something more than soup."

"Nepapinas says that you may have a bit of boiled fish for supper," she assured him.

"You know I don't mean that. I want to know why you shot me, and what you think you are going to do with me."

"I shot you by mistake—and—I don't know just what to do with you," she said, looking at him tranquilly, but with what he thought was a growing shadow of perplexity in her eyes. "Bateese says to fasten a big stone to your neck and throw you in the river. But Bateese doesn't always mean what he says. I don't think he is quite as bloodthirsty——"

"—As the young lady who tried to murder me behind the rock," Carrigan interjected.

"Exactly, m'sieu. I don't think he would throw you into the river—unless I told him to. And I don't believe I am going to ask him to do that," she added, the soft glow flashing back into her eyes for an instant. "Not after the splendid work Nepapinas has

done on your head. St. Pierre must see that. And then, if St. Pierre wishes to finish you, why——" She shrugged her slim shoulders and made a little gesture with her hands.

In that same moment there came over her a change as sudden as the passing of light itself. It was as if a thing she was hiding had broken beyond her control for an instant and had betrayed her. The gesture died. The glow went out of her eyes, and in its place came a light that was almost fear—or pain. She came nearer to Carrigan again, and somehow, looking up at her, he thought of the little brush warbler singing at the end of its birch twig to give him courage. It must have been because of her throat, white and soft, which he saw pulsing like a beating heart before she spoke to him.

"I have made a terrible mistake, m'sieu David," she said, her voice barely rising above a whisper. "I'm sorry I hurt you. I thought it was some one else behind the rock. But I can not tell you more than that—ever. And I know it is impossible for us to be friends." She paused, one of her hands creeping to her bare throat, as if to cover the throbbing he had seen there.

"Why is it impossible?" he demanded, leaning away from his pillows so that he might bring himself nearer to her.

"Because—you are of the police, m'sieu."

"The police, yes," he said, his heart thrumming inside his breast. "I am Sergeant Carrigan. I am out

after Roger Audemard, a murderer. But my commission has nothing to do with the daughter of St. Pierre Boulain. Please—let's be friends——"

He held out his hand; and in that moment David Carrigan placed another thing higher than duty—and in his eyes was the confession of it, like the glow of a subdued fire. The girl's fingers drew more closely at her throat, and she made no movement to accept his hand.

"Friends," he repeated. "Friends—in spite of the police."

Slowly the girl's eyes had widened, as if she saw that new-born thing riding over all other things in his swiftly beating heart. And afraid of it, she drew a step away from him.

"I am not St. Pierre Boulain's daughter," she said, forcing the words out one by one. "I am—his wife."

VII

AFTERWARD Carrigan wondered to what depths he had fallen in the first moments of his disillusionment. Something like shock, perhaps even more than that, must have betrayed itself in his face. He did not speak. Slowly his outstretched arm dropped to the white counterpane. Later he called himself a fool for allowing it to happen, for it was as if he had measured his proffered friendship by what its future might hold for him. In a low, quiet voice Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain was saying again that she was St. Pierre's wife. She was not excited, yet he understood now why it was he had thought her eyes were very dark. They had changed swiftly. The violet freckles in them were like little flecks of gold. They were almost liquid in their glow, neither brown nor black now, and with that threat of gathering lightning in them. For the first time he saw the slightest flush of color in her cheeks. It deepened even as he held out his hand again. He knew that it was not embarrassment. It was the heat of the fire back of her eyes.

"It's—funny," he said, making an effort to redeem himself with a lie and smiling. "You rather amaze me. You see, I have been told this St. Pierre is an

old, old man—so old that he can't stand on his feet or go with his brigades, and if that is the truth, it is hard for me to picture you as his wife. But that isn't a reason why we should not be friends. Is it?"

He felt that he was himself again, except for the three days' growth of beard on his face. He tried to laugh, but it was rather a poor attempt. And St. Pierre's wife did not seem to hear him. She was looking at him, looking into and through him with those wide-open glowing eyes. Then she sat down, out of reach of the hand which he had held toward her.

"You are a sergeant of the police," she said, the softness gone suddenly out of her voice. "You are an honorable man, m'sieu. Your hand is against all wrong. Is it not so?" It was the voice of an inquisitor. She was demanding an answer of him.

He nodded. "Yes, it is so."

The fire in her eyes deepened. "And yet you say you want to be the friend of a stranger who has tried to kill you. *Why,* m'sieu?"

He was cornered. He sensed the humiliation of it, the impossibility of confessing to her the wild impulse that had moved him before he knew she was St. Pierre's wife. And she did not wait for him to answer.

"This—this Roger Audemard—if you catch him—what will you do with him?" she asked.

"He will be hanged," said David. "He is a murderer."

"And one who tries to kill—who almost succeeds—what is the penalty for that?" She leaned toward him, waiting. Her hands were clasped tightly in her lap, the spots were brighter in her cheeks.

"From ten to twenty years," he acknowledged. "But, of course, there may be circumstances——"

"If so, you do not know them," she interrupted him. "You say Roger Audemard is a murderer. You know I tried to kill you. Then why is it you would be my friend and Roger Audemard's enemy? Why, m'sieu?"

Carrigan shrugged his shoulders hopelessly. "I shouldn't," he confessed. "I guess you are proving I was wrong in what I said. I ought to arrest you and take you back to the Landing as soon as I can. But, you see, it strikes me there is a big personal element in this. I was the man almost killed. There was a mistake,—must have been, for as soon as you put me out of business you began nursing me back to life again. And——"

"But that doesn't change it," insisted St. Pierre's wife. "If there had been no mistake, there would have been a murder. Do you understand, m'sieu? If it had been some one else behind that rock, I am quite certain he would have died. The Law, at least, would have called it murder. If Roger Audemard is a criminal, then I also am a criminal. And an honorable man would not make a distinction because one of them is a woman!"

"But—Black Roger was a fiend. He deserves no mercy. He——"

"Perhaps, m'sieu!"

She was on her feet, her eyes flaming down upon him. In that moment her beauty was like the beauty of Carmin Fanchet. The poise of her slender body, her glowing cheeks, her lustrous hair, her gold-flecked eyes with the light of diamonds in them, held him speechless.

"I was sorry and went back for you," she said. "I wanted you to live, after I saw you like that on the sand. Bateese says I was indiscreet, that I should have left you there to die. Perhaps he is right. And yet—even Roger Audemard might have had that pity for you."

She turned quickly, and he heard her moving away from him. Then, from the door, she said,

"Bateese will make you comfortable, m'sieu."

The door opened and closed. She was gone. And he was alone in the cabin again.

The swiftness of the change in her amazed him. It was as if he had suddenly touched fire to an explosive. There had been the flare, but no violence. She had not raised her voice, yet he heard in it the tremble of an emotion that was consuming her. He had seen the flame of it in her face and eyes. Something he had said, or had done, had tremendously upset her, changing in an instant her attitude toward him. The thought that came to him made his face burn under its scrub

of beard. Did she think he was a scoundrel? The dropping of his hand, the shock that must have betrayed itself in his face when she said she was St. Pierre's wife—had those things warned her against him? The heat went slowly out of his face. It was impossible. She could not think that of him. It must have been a sudden giving way under terrific strain. She had compared herself to Roger Audemard, and she was beginning to realize her peril—that Bateese was right—that she should have left him to die in the sand!

The thought pressed itself heavily upon Carrigan. It brought him suddenly back to a realization of how small a part he had played in this last half hour in the cabin. He had offered to Pierre's wife a friendship which he had no right to offer and which she knew he had no right to offer. He was the Law. And she, like Roger Audemard, was a criminal. Her quick woman's instinct had told her there could be no distinction between them, unless there was a reason. And now Carrigan confessed to himself that there had been a reason. That reason had come to him with the first glimpse of her as he lay in the hot sand. He had fought against it in the canoe; it had mastered him in those thrilling moments when he had beheld this slim, beautiful creature riding fearlessly into the boiling waters of the Holy Ghost. Her eyes, her hair, the sweet, low voice that had been with him in his fever, had become a definite and unalterable part of him. And this

must have shown in his eyes and face when he dropped his hand—when she told him she was St. Pierre's wife.

And now she was afraid of him! She was regretting that she had not left him to die. She had misunderstood what she had seen betraying itself during those few seconds of his proffered friendship. She saw only a man whom she had nearly killed, a man who represented the Law, a man whose power held her in the hollow of his hand. And she had stepped back from him, startled, and had told him that she was not St. Pierre's daughter, but his wife!

In the science of criminal analysis Carrigan always placed himself in the position of the other man. And he was beginning to see the present situation from the view-point of Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain. He was satisfied that she had made a desperate mistake and that until the last moment she had believed it was another man behind the rock. Yet she had shown no inclination to explain away her error. She had definitely refused to make an explanation. And it was simply a matter of common sense to concede that there must be a powerful motive for her refusal. There was but one conclusion for him to arrive at—the error which St. Pierre's wife had made in shooting the wrong man was less important to her than keeping the secret of why she had wanted to kill some other man.

David was not unconscious of the breach in his own armor. He had weakened, just as the Superintendent of "N" Division had weakened that day four years ago

when they had almost quarreled over Carmin Fanchet.

"I'll swear to Heaven she isn't bad, no matter what her brother has been," McVane had said. "I'll gamble my life on that, Carrigan!"

And because the Chief of Division with sixty years of experience behind him, had believed that, Carmin Fanchet had not been held as an accomplice in her brother's evildoing, but had gone back into her wilderness uncrucified by the law that had demanded the life of her brother. He would never forget the last time he had seen Carmin Fanchet's eyes—great, black, glorious pools of gratitude as they looked at grizzled old McVane; blazing fires of venomous hatred when they turned on him. And he had said to McVane,

"The man pays, the woman goes—justice indeed is blind!"

McVane, not being a stickler on regulations when it came to Carrigan, had made no answer.

The incident came back vividly to David as he waited for the promised coming of Bateese. He began to appreciate McVane's point of view, and it was comforting, because he realized that his own logic was assailable. If McVane had been comparing the two women now, he knew what his argument would be. There had been no absolute proof of crime against Carmin Fanchet, unless to fight desperately for the life of her brother was a crime. In the case of Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain there was proof. She had tried

to kill. Therefore, of the two, Carmin Fanchet would have been the better woman in the eyes of McVane.

In spite of the legal force of the argument which he was bringing against himself, David felt unconvinced. Carmin Fanchet, had she been in the place of St. Pierre's wife, would have finished him there in the sand. She would have realized the menace of letting him live and would probably have commanded Bateese to dump him in the river. St. Pierre's wife had gone to the other extreme. She was not only repentant, but was making restitution for her mistake, and in making that restitution had crossed far beyond the dead-line of caution. She had frankly told him who she was; she had brought him into the privacy of what was undeniably her own home; in her desire to undo what she had done she had hopelessly enmeshed herself in the net of the Law—if that Law saw fit to act. She had done these things with courage and conviction. And of such a woman, Carrigan thought, St. Pierre must be very proud.

He looked slowly about the cabin again and each thing that he saw was a living voice breaking up a dream for him. These voices told him that he was in a temple built because of a man's worship for a woman —and that man was St. Pierre. Through the two western windows came the last glow of the western sun, like a golden benediction finding its way into a sacred place. Here there was—or had been—a great happiness, for only a great pride and a great happiness could

have made it as it was. Nothing that wealth and toil could drag up out of a civilization a thousand miles away had been too good for St. Pierre's wife. And about him, looking more closely, David saw the undisturbed evidences of a woman's contentment. On the table were embroidery materials with which she had been working, and a lamp-shade half finished. A woman's magazine printed in a city four thousand miles away lay open at the fashion plates. There were other magazines, and many books, and open music above the white keyboard of the piano, and vases glowing red and yellow with wild-flowers and silver birch leaves. He could smell the faint perfume of the fireglow blossoms, red as blood. In a pool of sunlight on one of the big white bear rugs lay the sleeping cat. And then, at the far end of the cabin, an ivory-white Cross of Christ glowed for a few moments in a last homage of the sinking sun.

Uneasiness stole upon him. This was the woman's holy ground, her sanctuary and her home, and for three days his presence had driven her from it. There was no other room. In making restitution she had given up to him her most sacred of all things. And again there rose up in him that new-born thing which had set strange fires stirring in his heart, and which from this hour on he knew he must fight until it was dead.

For an hour after the last of the sun was obliterated by the western mountains he lay in the gloom of com-

ing darkness. Only the lapping of water under the bateau broke the strange stillness of the evening. He heard no sound of life, no voice, no tread of feet, and he wondered where the woman and her men had gone and if the scow was still tied up at the edge of the tar-sands. And for the first time he asked himself another question. Where was the man, St. Pierre?

VIII

IT was utterly dark in the cabin, when the stillness was broken by low voices outside. The door opened, and some one came in. A moment later a match flared up, and in the shifting glow of it Carrigan saw the dark face of Bateese, the half-breed. One after another he lighted the four lamps. Not until he had finished did he turn toward the bed. It was then that David had his first good impression of the man. He was not tall, but built with the strength of a giant. His arms were long. His shoulders were stooped. His head was like the head of a stone gargoyle come to life. Wide-eyed, heavy-lipped, with the high cheek-bones of an Indian and uncut black hair bound with the knotted red *mouchoir,* he looked more than ever like a pirate and a cutthroat to David. Such a man, he thought, might make play out of the business of murder. And yet, in spite of his ugliness, David felt again the mysterious inclination to like the man.

Bateese grinned. It was a huge grin, for his mouth was big. "You ver' lucky fellow," he announced "You sleep lak that in nice sof' bed an' not back on san'-bar, dead lak ze feesh I bring you, m'sieu. That

ees wan beeg mistake. Bateese say, 'Tie ze stone roun' hees neck an' mak' heem wan *ange de mer*. Chuck heem in ze river, *ma belle* Jeanne!' An' she say no, mak heem well, an' feed heem feesh. So I bring ze feesh which she promise, an' when you have eat, I tell you somet'ing!"

He returned to the door and brought back with him a wicker basket. Then he drew up the table beside Carrigan and proceeded to lay out before him the boiled fish which St. Pierre's wife had promised him. With it was bread and an earthen pot of hot tea.

"She say that ees all you have because of ze fever. Bateese say, 'Stuff heem wit' much so that he die queek!' "

"You want to see me dead. Is that it, Bateese?"

"*Oui*. You mak' wan ver' good dead man, m'sieu!" Bateese was no longer grinning. He stood back and pointed at the food. "You eat—queek. An' when you have finish' I tell you somet'ing!"

Now that he saw the luscious bit of whitefish before him, Carrigan was possessed of the hungering emptiness of three days and nights. As he ate, he observed that Bateese was performing curious duties. He straightened a couple of rugs, ran fresh water into the flower vases, picked up half a dozen scattered magazines, and then, to David's increasing interest, produced a dust-cloth from somewhere and began to dust. David finished his fish, the one slice of bread, and his cup of tea. He felt tremendously good. The

hot tea was like a trickle of new life through every vein in his body, and he had the desire to get up and try out his legs. Suddenly Bateese discovered that his patient was laughing at him.

"*Que diable!*" he demanded, coming up ferociously with the cloth in his great hand. "You see somet'ing ver' fonny, m'sieu?"

"No, nothing funny, Bateese," grinned Carrigan. "I was just thinking what a handsome chambermaid you make. You are so gentle, so nice to look at, so——"

"*Diable!*" exploded Bateese, dropping his dust cloth and bringing his huge hands down upon the table with a smash that almost wrecked the dishes. "You have eat, an' now you lissen. You have never hear' before of Concombre Bateese. An' zat ees me. See! Wit' these two hands I have choke' ze polar bear to deat'. I am strongest man w'at ees in all nort' countree. I pack four hundre' pound ovair portage. I crack ze caribou bones wit' my teeth, lak a dog. I run sixt' or hundre' miles wit'out stop for rest. I pull down trees w'at oder man cut wit' axe. I am not 'fraid of not'ing. You lissen? You hear w'at I say?"

"I hear you."

"*Bien!* Then I tell you w'at Concombre Bateese ees goin' do wit' you, M'sieu Sergent de Police! *Ma belle* Jeanne she mak' wan gran' meestake. She too much leetle bird heart, too much pity for want you to die. Bateese say, 'Keel him, so no wan know w'at happen t'ree day ago behin' ze rock.' But *ma belle* Jeanne, she

say, 'No, Bateese, he ees meestake for oder man, an' we mus' let heem live.' An' then she tell me to come an' bring you feesh, an' tell you w'at is goin' happen if you try go away from thees bateau. You *compren'?* If you try run away, Bateese ees goin' keel you! See—wit' thees han's I br'ak your neck an' t'row you in river. *Ma belle* Jeanne say do zat, an' she tell oder mans—twent', thirt', almos' hundre' *garcons*—to keel you if you try run away. She tell me bring zat word to you wit' ze feesh. You listen hard w'at I say?"

If ever a worker of iniquity lived on earth, Carrigan might have judged Bateese as that man in these moments. The half-breed had worked himself up to a ferocious pitch. His eyes rolled. His wide mouth snarled in the virulence of its speech. His thick neck grew corded, and his huge hands clenched menacingly upon the table. Yet David had no fear. He wanted to laugh, but he knew laughter would be the deadliest of insults to Bateese just now. He remembered that the half-breed, fierce as a pirate, had a touch as gentle as a woman's. This man, who could choke an ox with his monstrous hands, had a moment before petted a cat, straightened out rugs, watered the woman's flowers, and had dusted. He was harmless—now. And yet in the same breath David sensed the fact that a single word from St. Pierre's wife would be sufficient to fire his brute strength into a blazing volcano of action. Such a henchman was priceless—under certain

conditions! And he had brought a warning straight from the woman.

"I think I understand what you mean, Bateese," he said. "She says that I am to make no effort to leave this bateau—that I am to be killed if I try to escape? Are you sure she said that?"

"*Par les mille cornes du diable,* you t'ink Bateese lie, m'sieu? Concombre Bateese, who choke ze w'ite bear wit' hees two han', who pull down ze tree——"

"No, no, I don't think you lie. But I am wondering why she didn't tell me that when she was here."

"Becaus' she have too much leetle bird heart, zat ees w'y. She say: 'Bateese, you tell heem he mus' wait for St. Pierre. An' you tell heem good an' hard, lak you choke ze w'ite bear an' lak you pull down ze tree, so he mak' no meestake an' try get away.' An' she tell zat before all ze *bateliers*—all ze St. Pierre mans gathered 'bout a beeg fire—an' they shout up lak wan *garçon* that they watch an' keel you if you try get away."

Carrigan reached out a hand. "Let's shake, Bateese. I'll give you my word that I won't try to escape—not until you and I have a good stand-up fight with the earth under our feet, and I've whipped you. Is it a go?"

Bateese stared for a moment, and then his face broke into a wide grin. "You lak ze fight, m'sieu?"

"Yes. I love a scrap with a good man like you."

One of Bateese's huge hands crawled slowly over

the table and engulfed David's. Joy shone on his face.

"An' you promise give me zat fight, w'en you are strong?"

"If I don't, I'll let you tie a stone around my neck and drop me into the river."

"You are brave *garçon,*" cried the delighted Bateese. "Up an' down ze rivers ees no man w'at can whip Concombre Bateese!" Suddenly his face grew clouded. "But ze head, m'sieu?" he added anxiously.

"It will get well quickly if you will help me, Bateese. Right now I want to get up. I want to stretch my legs. Was my head bad?"

"*Non.* Ze bullet scrape ze ha'r off—so—so—an' turn ze brain seek. I t'ink you be good fighting man in week!"

"And you will help me up?"

Bateese was a changed man. Again David felt that mighty but gentle strength of his arms as he helped him to his feet. He was a trifle unsteady for a moment. Then, with the half-breed close at his side, ready to catch him if his legs gave way, he walked to one of the windows and looked out. Across the river, fully half a mile away, he saw the glow of fires.

"Her camp?" he asked.

"*Oui,* m'sieu."

"We have moved from the tar-sands?"

"Yes, two days down ze river."

"Why are they not camping over here with us?"

Bateese gave a disgusted grunt. "Becaus' *ma belle* Jeanne have such leetle bird heart, m'sieu. She say you mus' not have noise near, lak ze talk an' laugh an' ze *chansons*. She say it disturb, an' zat it mak you worse wit' ze fever. She ees mak you lak de baby, Bateese say to her. But she on'y laugh at zat an' snap her leetle w'ite finger. Wait St. Pierre come! He brak yo'r head wit' hees two fists. I hope we have ze fight before then, m'sieu!"

"We'll have it anyway, Bateese. Where is St. Pierre, and when shall we see him?"

Bateese shrugged his shoulders. "Mebby week, mebby more. He long way off."

"Is he an old man?"

Slowly Bateese turned David about until he was facing him. "You ask not'ing more about St. Pierre," he warned. "No mans talk 'bout St. Pierre. Only wan —*ma belle* Jeanne. You ask her, an' she tell you shut up. W'en you don't shut up she call Bateese to brak your head."

"You're a—a sort of all-round head-breaker, as I understand it," grunted David, walking slowly back to his bed. "Will you bring me my pack and clothes in the morning? I want to shave and dress."

Bateese was ahead of him, smoothing the pillows and straightening out the rumpled bed-clothes. His huge hands were quick and capable as a woman's, and David could not keep himself from chuckling at this feminine ingeniousness of the powerful half-breed. Once in the

crush of those gorilla-like arms that were working over his bed now, he thought, and it would be all over with the strongest man in "N" Division. Bateese heard the chuckle and looked up.

"Somet'ing ver' funny once more, is eet—w'at?" he demanded.

"I was thinking, Bateese—what will happen to me if you get me in those arms when we fight? But it isn't going to happen. I fight with my fists, and I'm going to batter you up so badly that nobody will recognize you for a long time."

"You wait!" exploded Bateese, making a horrible grimace. "I choke you lak w'ite bear, I t'row you ovair my should'r, I mash you lak leetle strawberr', I——" He paused in his task to advance with a formidable gesture.

"Not now," warned Carrigan. "I'm still a bit groggy, Bateese." He pointed down at the bed. "I'm driving *her* from that," he said. "I don't like it. Is she sleepin' over there—in the camp?"

"Mebby—an' mebby not, m'sieu," growled Bateese. "You mak' guess, eh?"

He began extinguishing the lights, until only the one nearest the door was left burning. He did not turn toward Carrigan or speak to him again. When he went out, David heard the click of a lock in the door. Bateese had not exaggerated. It was the intention of St. Pierre's wife that he should consider himself a prisoner—at least for tonight.

He had no desire to lie down again. There was an unsteadiness in his legs, but outside of that the evil of his sickness no longer oppressed him. The staff doctor at the Landing would probably have called him a fool for not convalescing in the usual prescribed way, but Carrigan was already beginning to feel the demand for action. In spite of what physical effort he had made, his head did not hurt him, and his mind was keenly alive. He returned to the window through which he could see the fires on the western shore, and found no difficulty in opening it. A strong screen netting kept him from thrusting out his head and shoulders. Through it came the cool night breeze of the river. It seemed good to fill his lungs with it again and smell the fresh aroma of the forest. It was very dark, and the fires across the river were brighter because of the deep gloom. There was no promise of the moon in the sky. He could not see a star. From far in the west he caught the low intonation of thunder.

Carrigan turned from the window to the end of the cabin in which the piano stood. Here, too, was the second divan, and he saw the meaning now of two close-tied curtains, one at each side of the cabin. Drawn together on a taut wire stretched two inches under the ceiling, they shut off this end of the bateau and turned at least a third of the cabin into the privacy of the woman's bedroom. With growing uneasiness David saw the evidences that this had been her sleeping apartment. At each side of the piano was a small

door, and he opened one of these just enough to discover that it was a wardrobe closet. A third door opened on the shore side of the bateau, but this was locked. Shut out from the view of the lower end of the cabin by a Japanese screen were a small dresser and a mirror. In the dim illumination that came from the distant lamp David bent over the open sheet of music on the piano. It was Mascagni's *Ave Maria.*

His blood tingled. His brain was stirred by a new emotion, a growing thing that made him uneasy and filled him with a strange restlessness. He felt as though he had come suddenly to the edge of a great danger; somewhere within him an intelligence seized upon it and understood. Yet it was not physical enough for him to fight. It was a danger which crept up and about him, something which he could not see or touch and yet which made his heart beat faster and the blood come into his face. It drew him, triumphed over him, dragged his hand forth until his fingers closed upon a lacy, crumpled bit of a handkerchief that lay on the edge of the piano keys. It was the woman's handkerchief, and like a thief he raised it slowly. It smelled faintly of crushed violets; it was as if she were bending over him in his sickness again, and it was her breath that came to him. He was not thinking of her as St. Pierre's wife. And then sharply he caught himself and placed the handkerchief back on the piano keys. He tried to laugh at himself, but there was an empti-

ness where a moment before there had been that thrill of which he was now ashamed.

He turned back to the window. The thunder had come nearer. It was coming up fast out of the west, and with it a darkness that was like the blackness of a pit. A dead stillness was preceding it now, and in that stillness it seemed to Carrigan that he could hear the soapy, slitting sound of the streaming flashes of electrical fire that blazoned the advance of the storm. The camp-fires across the river were dying down. One of them went out as he looked at it, and he stared into the darkness as if trying to pierce distance and gloom to see what sort of a shelter it was that St. Pierre's wife had over there. And there came over him in these moments a desire that was almost cowardly. It was the desire to escape, to leave behind him the memory of the rock and of St. Pierre's wife, and to pursue once more his own great adventure, the quest of Black Roger Audemard.

He heard the rain coming. At first the sound of it was like the pattering of ten million tiny feet in dry leaves; then, suddenly, it was like the roar of an avalanche. It was an inundation, and with it came crash after crash of thunder, and the black skies were illumined by an almost uninterrupted glare of lightning. It had been a long time since Carrigan had felt the shock of such a storm. He closed the window to keep the rain out, and after that stood with his face flattened against the glass, staring over the river. The

camp-fires were all gone now, blotted out like so many candles snuffed between thumb and forefinger, and he shuddered. No canvas ever made would keep that deluge out. And now there was growing up a wind with it. The tents on the other side would be beaten down like pegged sheets of paper, ripped up and torn to pieces. He imagined St. Pierre's wife in that tumult and distress—the breath blown out of her, half drowned, blinded by deluge and lightning, broken and beaten because of him. Thought of her companions did not ease his mind. Human hands were entirely inadequate to cope with a storm like this that was rocking the earth about him.

Suddenly he went to the door, determined that if Bateese was outside he would get some satisfaction out of him or challenge him to a fight right there. He beat against it, first with one fist and then with both. He shouted. There was no response. Then he exerted his strength and his weight against the door. It was solid.

He was half turned when his eyes discovered, in a corner where the lamplight struck dimly, his pack and clothes. In thirty seconds he had his pipe and tobacco. After that for half an hour he paced up and down the cabin, while the storm crashed and thundered as if bent upon destroying all life off the face of the earth.

Comforted by the company of his pipe, Carrigan did not beat at the door again. He waited, and at the end of another half-hour the storm had softened down into

a steady patter of rain. The thunder had traveled east, and the lightning had gone with it. David opened the window again. The air that came in was rain-sweet, soft, and warm. He puffed out a cloud of smoke and smiled. His pipe always brought his good humor to the surface, even in the worst places. St. Pierre's wife had certainly had a good soaking. And in a way the whole thing was a bit funny. He was thinking now of a poor little golden-plumaged partridge, soaked to the skin, with its tail-feathers dragging pathetically. Grinning, he told himself that it was an insult to think of her and a half-drowned partridge in the same breath. But the simile still remained, and he chuckled. Probably she was wringing out her clothes now, and the men were cursing under their breath while trying to light a fire. He watched for the fire. It failed to appear. Probably she was hating him for bringing all this discomfort and humiliation upon her. It was not impossible that tomorrow she would give Bateese permission to brain him. And St. Pierre? What would this man, her husband, think and do if he knew that his wife had given up her bedroom to this stranger? What complications might arise *if he knew!*

It was late—past midnight—when Carrigan went to bed. Even then he did not sleep for a long time. The patter of the rain grew less and less on the roof of the bateau, and as the sound of it droned itself off into nothingness, slumber came. David was conscious of the moment when the rain ceased entirely. Then he

slept. At least he must have been very close to sleep, or had been asleep and was returning for a moment close to consciousness, when he heard a voice. It came several times before he was roused enough to realize that it was a voice. And then, suddenly, piercing his slowly wakening brain almost with the shock of one of the thunder crashes, it came to him so distinctly that he found himself sitting up straight, his hands clenched, eyes staring in the darkness, waiting for it to come again.

Somewhere very near him, in his room, within the reach of his hands, a strange and indescribable voice had cried out in the darkness the words which twice before had beat themselves mysteriously into David Carrigan's brain—*"Has any one seen Black Roger Audemard? Has any one seen Black Roger Audemard?"*

And David, holding his breath, listened for the sound of another breath which he knew was in that room.

IX

FOR perhaps a minute Carrigan made no sound that could have been heard three feet away from him. It was not fear that held him quiet. It was something which he could not explain afterward, the sensation, perhaps, of one who feels himself confronted for a moment by a presence more potent than that of flesh and blood. *Black Roger Audemard!* Three times, twice in his sickness, some one had cried out that name in his ears since the hour when St. Pierre's wife had ambushed him on the white carpet of sand. And the voice was now in his room!

Was it Bateese, inspired by some sort of malformed humor? Carrigan listened. Another minute passed. He reached out a hand and groped about him, very careful not to make a sound, urged by the feeling that some one was almost within reach of him. He flung back his blanket and stood out in the middle of the floor.

Still he heard no movement, no soft footfalls of retreat or advance. He lighted a match and held it high above his head. In its yellow illumination he could see nothing alive. He lighted a lamp. The cabin was empty. He drew a deep breath and went to the

window. It was still open. The voice had undoubtedly come to him through that window, and he fancied he could see where the screen netting was crushed a bit inward, as though a face had pressed heavily against it. Outside the night was beautifully calm. The sky, washed by storm, was bright with stars. But there was not a ripple of movement that he could hear.

After that he looked at his watch. He must have been sleeping for some time when the voice roused him, for it was nearly three o'clock. In spite of the stars, dawn was close at hand. When he looked out of the window again they were paler and more distant. He had no intention of going back to bed. He was restless and felt himself surrendering more and more to the grip of presentiment.

It was still early, not later than six o'clock, when Bateese came in with his breakfast. He was surprised, as he had heard no movement or sound of voices to give evidence of life anywhere near the bateau. Instantly he made up his mind that it was not Bateese who had uttered the mysterious words of a few hours ago, for the half-breed had evidently experienced a most uncomfortable night. He was like a rat recently pulled out of water. His clothes hung upon him sodden and heavy, his head kerchief dripped, and his lank hair was wet. He slammed the breakfast things down on the table and went out again without so much as nodding at his prisoner.

Again a sense of discomfort and shame swept over David, as he sat down to breakfast. Here he was

comfortably, even luxuriously, housed, while out there somewhere St. Pierre's lovely wife was drenched and even more miserable than Bateese. And the breakfast amazed him. It was not so much the caribou tenderloin, rich in its own red juice, or the potato, or the pot of coffee that was filling the cabin with its aroma, that roused his wonder, but the hot, brown muffins that accompanied the other things. Muffins! And after a deluge that had drowned every square inch of the earth! How had Bateese turned the trick?

Bateese did not return immediately for the dishes, and for half an hour after he had finished breakfast Carrigan smoked his pipe and watched the blue haze of fires on the far side of the river. The world was a blaze of sunlit glory. His imagination carried him across the river. Somewhere over there, in an open spot where the sun was blazing, Jeanne Marie-Anne was probably drying herself after the night of storm. There was but little doubt in his mind that she was already heaping the ignominy of blame upon him. That was the woman of it.

A knock at his door drew him about. It was a light, quick *tap, tap, tap*—not like the fist of either Bateese or Nepapinas. In another moment the door swung open, and in the flood of sunlight that poured into the cabin stood St. Pierre's wife!

It was not her presence, but the beauty of her, that held him spellbound. It was a sort of shock after the vivid imaginings of his mind in which he had seen her beaten and tortured by storm. Her hair, glowing in

the sun and piled up in shining coils on the crown of her head, was not wet. She was not the rain-beaten little partridge that had passed in tragic bedragglement through his mind. Storm had not touched her. Her cheeks were soft with the warm flush of long hours of sleep. When she came in, her lips greeting him with a little smile, all that he had built up for himself in the hours of the night crumbled away in dust. Again he forgot for a moment that she was St. Pierre's wife. She was *woman,* and as he looked upon her now, the most adorable woman in all the world.

"You are better this morning," she said. Real pleasure shone in her eyes. She had left the door open, so that the sun filled the room. "I think the storm helped you. Wasn't it splendid?"

David swallowed hard. "Quite splendid," he managed to say. "Have you seen Bateese this morning?"

A little note of laughter came into her throat. "Yes. I don't think he liked it. He doesn't understand why I love storms. Did you sleep well, M'sieu Carrigan?"

"An hour or two, I think. I was worrying about you. I didn't like the thought that I had turned you out into the storm. But it doesn't seem to have touched you."

"No. I was there—quite comfortable." She nodded to the forward bulkhead of the cabin, beyond the wardrobe closets and the piano. "There is a little dining-room and kitchenette ahead," she explained. "Didn't Bateese tell you that?"

"No, he didn't. I asked him where you were, and I think he told me to shut up."

"Bateese is very odd," said St. Pierre's wife. "He is exceedingly jealous of me, M'sieu David. Even when I was a baby and he carried me about in his arms, he was just that way. Bateese, you know, is older than he appears. He is fifty-one."

She was moving about, quite as if his presence was in no way going to disturb her usual duties of the day. She rearranged the damask curtains which he had crumpled with his hands, placed two or three chairs in their usual places, and moved from this to that with the air of a housewife who is in the habit of brushing up a bit in the morning.

She seemed not at all embarrassed because he was her prisoner, nor uncomfortably restrained because of the message she had sent to him by Bateese. She was warmly and gloriously human. In her apparent unconcern at his presence he found himself sweating inwardly. A bit nervously he struck a match to light his pipe, then extinguished it.

She noticed what he had done. "You may smoke," she said, with that little note in her throat which he loved to hear, like the faintest melody of laughter that did not quite reach her lips. "St. Pierre smokes a great deal, and I like it."

She opened a drawer in the dressing-table and came to him with a box half filled with cigars.

"St. Pierre prefers these—on occasions," she said. "Do you?"

His fingers seemed all thumbs as he took a cigar from the proffered box. He cursed himself because his tongue felt thick. Perhaps it was his silence, betraying something of his mental clumsiness, that brought a faint flush of color into her cheeks. He noted that; and also that the top of her shining head came just about to his chin, and that her mouth and throat, looking down on them, were bewitchingly soft and sweet.

And what she said, when her eyes opened wide and beautiful on him again, was like a knife cutting suddenly into the heart of his thoughts.

"In the evening I love to sit at St. Pierre's feet and watch him smoke," she said.

"I am glad it doesn't annoy you, because—I like to smoke," he replied lamely.

She placed the box on the little reading table and looked at his breakfast things. "You like muffins, too. I was up early this morning, making them for you!"

"*You* made them?" he demanded, as if her words were a most amazing revelation to him.

"Surely, M'sieu David. I make them every morning for St. Pierre. He is very fond of them. He says the third nicest thing about me is my muffins!"

"And the other two?" asked David.

"Are St. Pierre's little secrets, m'sieu," she laughed softly, the color deepening in her cheeks. "It wouldn't be fair to tell you, would it?"

"Perhaps it wouldn't," he said slowly. "But there

are one or two other things, Mrs.—Mrs. Boulain——"

"You may call me Jeanne, or Marie-Anne, if you care to," she interrupted him. "It will be quite all right."

She was picking up the breakfast dishes, not at all perturbed by the fact that she was offering him a privilege which had the effect of quickening his pulse for a moment or two.

"Thank you," he said. "I don't mind telling you it is going to be difficult for me to do that—because—well, this is a most unusual situation, isn't it? In spite of all your kindness, including what was probably your good-intentioned endeavor to put an end to my earthly miseries behind the rock, I believe it is necessary for you to give me some kind of explanation. Don't you?"

"Didn't Bateese explain to you last night?" she asked, facing him.

"He brought a message from you to the effect that I was a prisoner, that I must make no attempt to escape, and that if I did try to escape, you had given your men instructions to kill me."

She nodded, quite seriously. "That is right, M'sieu David."

His face flamed. "Then I am a prisoner? You threaten me with death?"

"I shall treat you very nicely if you make no attempt to escape, M'sieu David. Isn't that fair?"

"Fair!" he cried, choking back an explosion that would have vented itself on a man. "Don't you realize *what has happened?* Don't you know that according

to every law of God and man I should arrest you and give you over to the Law? Is it possible that you don't comprehend my own duty? What I must do?"

If he had noticed, he would have seen that there was no longer the flush of color in her cheeks. But her eyes, looking straight at him, were tranquil and unexcited. She nodded.

"That is why you must remain a prisoner, M'sieu David. It is because I do realize. I shall not tell you why that happened behind the rock, and if you ask me, I shall refuse to talk to you. If I let you go now, you would probably have me arrested and put in jail. So I must keep you until St. Pierre comes. I don't know what to do—except to keep you, and not let you escape until then. What would you do?"

The question was so honest, so like a question that might have been asked by a puzzled child, that his argument for the Law was struck dead. He stared into the pale face, the beautiful, waiting eyes, saw the pathetic intertwining of her slim fingers, and suddenly he was grinning in that big, honest way which made people love Dave Carrigan.

"You're—doing—absolutely—right," he said.

A swift change came in her face. Her cheeks flushed. Her eyes filled with a sudden glow that made the little violet-freckles in them dance like tiny flecks of gold.

"From your point of view you are right," he repeated, "and I shall make no attempt to escape until

I have talked with St. Pierre. But I can't quite see—just now—how he is going to help the situation."

"He will," she assured him confidently.

"You seem to have an unlimited faith in St. Pierre," he replied a little grimly.

"Yes, M'sieu David. He is the most wonderful man in the world. And he will know what to do."

David shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps, in some nice, quiet place, he will follow the advice Bateese gave you—tie a stone round my neck and sink me to the bottom of the river."

"Perhaps. But I don't think he will do that. I should object to it."

"Oh, you would!"

"Yes. St. Pierre is big and strong, afraid of nothing in the world, but he will do anything for me. I don't think he would kill you if I asked him not to." She turned to resume her task of cleaning up the breakfast things.

With a sudden movement David swung one of the big chairs close to her. "Please sit down," he commanded. "I can talk to you better that way. As an officer of the law it is my duty to ask you a few questions. It rests in your power to answer all of them or none of them. I have given you my word not to act until I have seen St. Pierre, and I shall keep that promise. But when we do meet I shall act largely on the strength of what you tell me during the next ten minutes. Please sit down!"

X

IN that big, deep chair which must have been St Pierre's own, Marie-Anne sat facing Carrigan. Between its great arms her slim little figure seemed diminutive and out of place. Her brown eyes were level and clear, waiting. They were not warm or nervous, but so coolly and calmly beautiful that they disturbed Carrigan. She raised her hands, her slim fingers crumpling for a moment in the soft, thick coils of her hair. That little movement, the unconscious feminism of it, the way she folded her hands in her lap afterward, disturbed Carrigan even more. What a glory on earth it must be to possess a woman like that! The thought made him uneasy. And she sat waiting, a vivid, softly-breathing question-mark against the warm coloring of the upholstered chair.

"When you shot me," he began, "I saw you, first, standing over me. I thought you had come to finish me. It was then that I saw something in your face—horror, amazement, as though you had done something you did not know you were doing. You see, I want to be charitable. I want to understand. I want to excuse you if I can. Won't you tell me why you

shot me, and why that change came over you when you saw me lying there?"

"No, M'sieu David, I shall not tell." She was not antagonistic or defiant. Her voice was not raised, nor did it betray an unusual emotion. It was simply decisive, and the unflinching steadiness of her eyes and the way in which she sat with her hands folded gave to it an unqualified definiteness.

"You mean that I must make my own guess?"

She nodded.

"Or get it out of St. Pierre?"

"If St. Pierre wishes to tell you, yes."

"Well——" He leaned a little toward her. "After that you dragged me up into the shade, dressed my wound and made me comfortable. In a hazy sort of way I knew what was going on. And a curious thing happened. At times—" he leaned still a little nearer to her—"at times—there seemed to be two of you!"

He was not looking at her hands, or he would have seen her fingers slowly tighten in her lap.

"You were badly hurt," she said. "It is not strange that you should have imagined things, M'sieu David."

"And I seemed to hear two voices," he went on.

She made no answer, but continued to look at him steadily.

"And the other had hair that was like copper and gold fire in the sun. I would see your face and then hers, again and again—and—since then—I have

thought I was a heavy load for your hands to drag up through that sand to the shade alone."

She held up her two hands, looking at them. "They are strong," she said.

"They are small," he insisted, "and I doubt if they could drag me across this floor."

For the first time the quiet of her eyes gave way to a warm fire. "It was hard work," she said, and the note in her voice gave him warning that he was approaching the dead-line again. "Bateese says I was a fool for doing it. And if you saw two of me, or three or four, it doesn't matter. Are you through questioning me, M'sieu David? If so, I have a number of things to do."

He made a gesture of despair. "No, I am not through. But why ask you questions if you won't answer them?"

"I simply can not. You must wait."

"For your husband?"

"Yes, for St. Pierre."

He was silent for a moment, then said, "I raved about a number of things when I was sick, didn't I?"

"You did, and especially about what you thought happened in the sand. You called this—this other person—the Fire Goddess. You were so near dying that of course it wasn't amusing. Otherwise it would have been. You see *my* hair is black, almost!" Again, in a quick movement, her fingers were crumpling the lustrous coils on the crown of her head.

"Why do you say 'almost'?" he asked.

"Because St. Pierre has often told me that when I am in the sun there are red fires in it. And the sun was very bright that afternoon in the sand, M'sieu David."

"I think I understand," he nodded. "And I'm rather glad, too. I like to know that it was you who dragged me up into the shade after trying to kill me. It proves you aren't quite so savage as——"

"Carmin Fanchet," she interrupted him softly "You talked about her in your sickness, M'sieu David. It made me terribly afraid of you—so much so that at times I almost wondered if Bateese wasn't right. It made me understand what would happen to *me* if I should let you go. What terrible thing did she do to you? What could she have done more terrible than I have done?"

"Is that why you have given your men orders to kill me if I try to escape?" he asked. "Because I talked about this woman, Carmin Fanchet?"

"Yes, it is because of Carmin Fanchet that I am keeping you for St. Pierre," she acknowledged. "If you had no mercy for her, you could have none for me. What terrible thing did she do to you, M'sieu?"

"Nothing—to me," he said, feeling that she was putting him where the earth was unsteady under his feet again. "But her brother was a criminal of the worst sort. And I was convinced then, and am convinced now, that his sister was a partner in his crimes She

was very beautiful. And that, I think, was what saved her."

He was fingering his unlighted cigar as he spoke. When he looked up, he was surprised at the swift change that had come into the face of St. Pierre's wife. Her cheeks were flaming, and there were burning fires screened behind the long lashes of her eyes. But her voice was unchanged. It was without a quiver that betrayed the emotion which had sent the hot flush into her face.

"Then—you judged her without absolute knowledge of fact? You judged her—as you hinted in your fever—because she fought so desperately to save a brother who had gone wrong?"

"I believe she was bad."

The long lashes fell lower, like fringes of velvet closing over the fires in her eyes. "But you didn't *know!*"

"Not absolutely," he conceded. "But investigations——"

"Might have shown her to be one of the most wonderful women that ever lived, M'sieu David. It is not hard to fight for a good brother—but if he is bad, it may take an angel to do it!"

He stared, thoughts tangling themselves in his head. A slow shame crept over him. She had cornered him. She had convicted him of unfairness to the one creature on earth his strength and his manhood were bound to protect—a woman. She had convicted him of judging

without fact. And in his head a voice seemed to cry out to him, "What did Carmin Fanchet ever do to you?"

He rose suddenly to his feet and stood at the back of his chair, his hands gripping the top of it. "Maybe you are right," he said. "Maybe I was wrong. I remember now that when I got Fanchet I manacled him, and she sat beside him all through that first night. I didn't intend to sleep, but I was tired—and did. I must have slept for an hour, and *she* roused me—trying to get the key to the handcuffs. She had the opportunity then—to kill me."

Triumph swept over the face that was looking up at him. "Yes, she could have killed you—while you slept. But she didn't. *Why?*"

"I don't know. Perhaps she had the idea of getting the key and letting her brother do the job. Two or three days later I am convinced she would not have hesitated. I caught her twice trying to steal my gun. And a third time, late at night, when we were within a day or two of Athabasca Landing, she almost got me with a club. So I concede that she never did anything very terrible to me. But I am sure that she tried, especially toward the last."

"And because she failed, she hated you; and because she hated you, something was warped inside you, and you made up your mind she should be punished along with her brother. You didn't look at it from a woman's viewpoint. A woman will fight, and kill, to save one

she loves. She tried, perhaps, and failed. The result was that her brother was killed by the Law. Was not that enough? Was it fair or honest to destroy her simply because you thought she might be a partner in her brother's crimes?"

"It is rather strange," he replied, a moment of indecision in his voice. "McVane, the superintendent, asked me that same question. I thought he was touched by her beauty. And I'm sorry—very sorry—that I talked about her when I was sick. I don't want you to think I am a bad sort—that way. I'm going to think about it. I'm going over the whole thing again, from the time I manacled Fanchet, and if I find that I was wrong—and I ever meet Carmin Fanchet again—I shall not be ashamed to get down on my knees and ask her pardon, Marie-Anne!"

For the first time he spoke the name which she had given him permission to use. And she noticed it. He could not help seeing that—a flashing instant in which the indefinable confession of it was in her face, as though his use of it had surprised her, or pleased her, or both. Then it was gone.

She did not answer, but rose from the big chair, and went to the window, and stood with her back toward him, looking out over the river. And then, suddenly, they heard a voice. It was the voice he had heard twice in his sickness, the voice that had roused him from his sleep last night, crying out in his room for Black Roger Audemard. It came to him distinctly

through the open door in a low and moaning monotone. He had not taken his eyes from the slim figure of St. Pierre's wife, and he saw a little tremor pass through her now.

"I heard that voice—again—last night," said David. "It was in this cabin, asking for Black Roger Audemard."

She did not seem to hear him, and he also turned so that he was looking at the open door of the cabin.

The sun, pouring through in a golden flood, was all at once darkened, and in the doorway—framed vividly against the day—was the figure of a man. A tense breath came to Carrigan's lips. At first he felt a shock, then an overwhelming sense of curiosity and of pity. The man was terribly deformed. His back and massive shoulders were so twisted and bent that he stood no higher than a twelve-year-old boy; yet standing straight, he would have been six feet tall if an inch, and splendidly proportioned. And in that same breath with which shock and pity came to him, David knew that it was accident and not birth that had malformed the great body that stood like a crouching animal in the open door. At first he saw only the grotesqueness of it—the long arms that almost touched the floor, the broken back, the twisted shoulders—and then, with a deeper thrill, he saw nothing of these things but only the face and the head of the man. There was something god-like about them, fastened there between the crippled shoulders. It was not beauty, but

strength—the strength of rock, of carven granite, as if each feature had been chiseled out of something imperishable and everlasting, yet lacking strangely and mysteriously the warm illumination that comes from a living soul. The man was not old, nor was he young. And he did not seem to see Carrigan, who stood nearest to him. He was looking at St. Pierre's wife.

The look which David saw in her face was infinitely tender. She was smiling at the misshapen hulk in the door as she might have smiled at a little child. And David, looking back at the wide, deep-set eyes of the man, saw the slumbering fire of a dog-like worship in them. They shifted slowly, taking in the cabin, questing, seeking, searching for something which they could not find. The lips moved, and again he heard that weird and mysterious monotone, as if the plaintive voice of a child were coming out of the huge frame of the man, crying out as it had cried last night, *"Has-any-one-seen-Black-Roger-Audemard?"*

In another moment St. Pierre's wife was at the deformed giant's side. She seemed tall beside him. She put her hands to his head and brushed back the grizzled black hair, laughing softly into his upturned face, her eyes shining and a strange glow in her cheeks. Carrigan, looking at them, felt his heart stand still. *Was that man St. Pierre?* The thought came like a lightning flash—and went as quickly; it was impossible and inconceivable. And yet there was something more than pity in the voice of the woman who was speaking now.

"No, no, we have not seen him, André—we have not seen Black Roger Audemard. If he comes, I will call you. I promise, *Michiwan.* I will call you!"

She was stroking his bearded cheek, and then she put an arm about his twisted shoulders, and slowly she turned so that in a moment or two they were facing the sun—and it seemed to Carrigan that she was talking and sobbing and laughing in the same breath, as that great, broken hulk of a man moved out slowly from under the caress of her arm and went on his way. For a space she looked after him. Then in a swift movement she closed the door and faced Carrigan. She did not speak, but waited. Her head was high. She was breathing quickly. The tenderness that a moment before had filled her face was gone, and in her eyes was the blaze of fighting fires as she waited for him to speak—to give voice to what she knew was passing in his mind.

XI

FOR a space there was silence between Carrigan and St. Pierre's wife. He knew what she was thinking as she stood with her back to the door, waiting half defiantly, her cheeks still flushed, her eyes bright with the anticipation of battle. She was ready to fight for the broken creature on the other side of the door. She expected him to give no quarter in his questioning of her, to corner her if he could, to demand of her why the deformed giant had spoken the name of the man he was after, Black Roger Audemard. The truth hammered in David's brain. It had not been a delusion of his fevered mind after all; it was not a possible deception of the half-breed's, as he had thought last night. Chance had brought him face to face with the mystery of Black Roger. St. Pierre's wife, waiting for him to speak, was in some way associated with that mystery, and the cripple was asking for the man McVane had told him to bring in dead or alive! Yet he did not question her. He turned to the window and looked out from where Marie-Anne had stood a few moments before.

The day was glorious. On the far shore he saw life where last night's camp had been. Men were moving

about close to the water, and a York boat was putting out slowly into the stream. Close under the window moved a canoe with a single occupant. It was André, the Broken Man. With powerful strokes he was paddling across the river. His deformity was scarcely noticeable in the canoe. His bare head and black beard shone in the sun, and between his great shoulders his head looked more than ever to Carrigan like the head of a carven god. And this man, like a mighty tree stricken by lightning, his mind gone, was yet a thing that was more than mere flesh and blood to Marie-Anne Boulain!

David turned toward her. Her attitude was changed. It was no longer one of proud defiance. She had expected to defend herself from something, and he had given her no occasion for defense. She did not try to hide the fact from him, and he nodded toward the window.

"He is going away in a canoe. I am afraid you didn't want me to see him, and I am sorry I happened to be here when he came."

"I made no effort to keep him away, M'sieu David. Perhaps I wanted you to see him. And I thought, when you did——" She hesitated.

"You expected me to crucify you, if necessary, to learn the truth of what he knows about Roger Audemard," he said. "And you were ready to fight back. But I am not going to question you unless you give me permission."

"I am glad," she said in a low voice. "I am beginning to have faith in you, M'sieu David. You have promised not to try to escape, and I believe you. Will you also promise not to ask me questions, which I can not answer—until St. Pierre comes?"

"I will try."

She came up to him slowly and stood facing him, so near that she could have reached out and put her hands on his shoulders.

"St. Pierre has told me a great deal about the Scarlet Police," she said, looking at him quietly and steadily. "He says that the men who wear the red jackets never play low tricks, and that they come after a man squarely and openly. He says they are men, and many times he has told me wonderful stories of the things they have done. He calls it 'playing the game.' And I'm going to ask you, M'sieu David, will you play square with me? If I give you the freedom of the bateau, of the boats, even of the shore, will you wait for St. Pierre and play the rest of the game out with him, man to man?"

Carrigan bowed his head slightly. "Yes, I will wait and finish the game with St. Pierre."

He saw a quick throb come and go in her white throat, and with a sudden, impulsive movement she held out her hand to him. For a moment he held it close. Her little fingers tightened about his own, and the warm thrill of them set his blood leaping with the thing he was fighting down. She was so near that he

could feel the throb of her body. For an instant she bowed her head, and the sweet perfume of her hair was in his nostrils, the lustrous beauty of it close under his lips.

Gently she withdrew her hand and stood back from him. To Carrigan she was like a young girl now. It was the loveliness of girlhood he saw in the flush of her face and in the gladness that was flaming unashamed in her eyes.

"I am not frightened any more," she exclaimed, her voice trembling a bit. "When St. Pierre comes, I shall tell him everything. And then you may ask the questions, and he will answer. And he will not cheat! He will play square. You will love St. Pierre, and you will forgive me for what happened behind the rock!"

She made a little gesture toward the door. "Everything is free to you out there now," she added. "I shall tell Bateese and the others. When we are tied up, you may go ashore. And we will forget all that has happened, M'sieu David. We will forget until St. Pierre comes."

"St. Pierre!" he groaned. "If there were no St. Pierre!"

"I should be lost," she broke in quickly. "I should want to die!"

Through the open window came the sound of a voice. It was the weird monotone of André, the Broken Man. Marie-Anne went to the window. And David, following her, looked over her head, again so

near that his lips almost touched her hair. André had come back. He was watching two York boats that were heading for the bateau.

"You heard him asking for Black Roger Audemard," she said. "It is strange. I know how it must have shocked you when he stood like that in the door. His mind, like his body, is a wreck, M'sieu David. Years ago, after a great storm, St. Pierre found him in the forest. A tree had fallen on him. St. Pierre carried him in on his shoulders. He lived, but he has always been like that. St. Pierre loves him, and poor André worships St. Pierre and follows him about like a dog. His brain is gone. He does not know what his name is, and we call him André. And always, day and night, he is asking that same question, 'Has any one seen Black Roger Audemard?' Sometime—if you will, M'sieu David—I should like to have you tell me what it is so terrible that you know about Roger Audemard."

The York boats were half-way across the river, and from them came a sudden burst of wild song. David could make out six men in each boat, their oars flashing in the morning sun to the rhythm of their chant. Marie-Anne looked up at him suddenly, and in her face and eyes he saw what the starry gloom of evening had half hidden from him in those thrilling moments when they shot through the rapids of the Holy Ghost. She was girl now. He did not think of her as woman. He did not think of her as St. Pierre's wife. In that upward glance of her eyes was something that thrilled

him to the depth of his soul. She seemed, for a moment, to have dropped a curtain from between herself and him.

Her red lips trembled, she smiled at him, and then she faced the river again, and he leaned a little forward, so that a breath of wind floated a shimmering tress of her hair against his cheek. An irresistible impulse seized upon him. He leaned still nearer to her, holding his breath, until his lips softly touched one of the velvety coils of her hair. And then he stepped back. Shame swept over him. His heart rose and choked him, and his fists were clenched at his side. She had not noticed what he had done, and she seemed to him like a bird yearning to fly out through the window, throbbing with the desire to answer the chanting song that came over the water. And then she was smiling up again into his face hardened with the struggle which he was making with himself.

"My people are happy," she cried. "Even in storm they laugh and sing. Listen, m'sieu. They are singing *La Dernière Domaine.* That is our song. It is what we call our home, away up there in the lost wilderness where people never come—the Last Domain. Their wives and sweethearts and families are up there, and they are happy in knowing that today we shall travel a few miles nearer to them. They are not like your people in Montreal and Ottawa and Quebec, M'sieu David. They are like children. And yet they are glorious children!"

She ran to the wall and took down the banner of St. Pierre Boulain. "St. Pierre is behind us," she explained. "He is coming down with a raft of timber such as we can not get in our country, and we are waiting for him. But each day we must float down with the stream a few miles nearer the homes of my people. It makes them happier, even though it is but a few miles. They are coming now for my bateau. We shall travel slowly, and it will be wonderful on a day like this. It will do you good to come outside, M'sieu David—with me. Would you care for that? Or would you rather be alone?"

In her face there was no longer the old restraint. On her lips was the witchery of a half-smile; in her eyes a glow that flamed the blood in his veins. It was not a flash of coquetry. It was something deeper and warmer than that, something real—a new Marie-Anne Boulain telling him plainly that she wanted him to come. He did not know that his hands were still clenched at his side. Perhaps she knew. But her eyes did not leave his face, eyes that were repeating the invitation of her lips, openly asking him not to refuse.

"I shall be happy to come," he said.

The words fell out of him numbly. He scarcely heard them or knew what he was saying, yet he was conscious of the unnatural note in his voice. He did not know he was betraying himself beyond that, did not see the deepening of the wild-rose flush in the cheeks

of St. Pierre's wife. He picked up his pipe from the table and moved to accompany her.

"You must wait a little while," she said, and her hand rested for an instant upon his arm. Its touch was as light as the touch of his lips had been against her shining hair, but he felt it in every nerve of his body. "Nepapinas is making a special lotion for your hurt. I will send him in, and then you may come."

The wild chant of the rivermen was near as she turned to the door. From it she looked back at him swiftly.

"They are happy, M'sieu David," she repeated softly. "And I, too, am happy. I am no longer afraid. And the world is beautiful again. Can you guess why? It is because you have given me your promise, M'sieu David, and because I believe you!"

And then she was gone.

For many minutes he did not move. The chanting of the rivermen, a sudden wilder shout, the voices of men, and after that the grating of something alongside the bateau came to him like sounds from another world. Within himself there was a crash greater than that of physical things. It was the truth breaking upon him, truth surging over him like the waves of a sea, breaking down the barriers he had set up, inundating him with a force that was mightier than his own will. A voice in his soul was crying out the truth—that above all else in the world he wanted to reach out his arms to this glorious creature who was the wife of

St. Pierre, this woman who had tried to kill him and was sorry. He knew that it was not desire for beauty. It was the worship which St. Pierre himself must have for this woman who was his wife. And the shock of it was like a conflagration sweeping through him, leaving him dead and shriven, like the crucified trees standing in the wake of a fire. A breath that was almost a cry came from him, and his fists knotted until they were purple. She was St. Pierre's wife! And he, David Carrigan, proud of his honor, proud of the strength that made him man, had dared covet her in this hour when her husband was gone! He stared at the closed door, beginning to cry out against himself, and over him there swept slowly and terribly another thing—the shame of his weakness, the hopelessness of the thing that for a space had eaten into him and consumed him.

And as he stared, the door opened, and Nepapina came in.

XII

DURING the next quarter of an hour David was as silent as the old Indian doctor. He was conscious of no pain when Nepapinas took off his bandage and bathed his head in the lotion he had brought. Before a fresh bandage was put on, he looked at himself for a moment in the mirror. It was the first time he had seen his wound, and he expected to find himself marked with a disfiguring scar. To his surprise there was no sign of his hurt except a slightly inflamed spot above his temple. He stared at Nepapinas, and there was no need of the question that was in his mind.

The old Indian understood, and his dried-up face cracked and crinkled in a grin. "Bullet hit a piece of rock, an' rock, not bullet, hit um head," he explained. "Make skull almost break—bend um in—but Nepapinas straighten again with fingers, so-so." He shrugged his thin shoulders with a cackling laugh of pride as he worked his claw-like fingers to show how the operation had been done.

David shook hands with him in silence; then Nepapinas put on the fresh bandage, and after that went out, chuckling again in his weird way, as though he

had played a great joke on the white man whom his wizardry had snatched out of the jaws of death.

For some time there had been a subdued activity outside. The singing of the boatmen had ceased, a low voice was giving commands, and looking through the window, David saw that the bateau was slowly swinging away from the shore. He turned from the window to the table and lighted the cigar St. Pierre's wife had given him.

In spite of the mental struggle he had made during the presence of Nepapinas, he had failed to get a grip on himself. For a time he had ceased to be David Carrigan, the man-hunter. A few days ago his blood had run to that almost savage thrill of the great game of one against one, the game in which Law sat on one side of the board and Lawlessness on the other, with the cards between. It was the great gamble. The cards meant life or death; there was never a checkmate—one or the other had to lose. Had some one told him then that soon he would meet the broken and twisted hulk of a man who had known Black Roger Audemard, every nerve in him would have thrilled in anticipation of that hour. He realized this as he paced back and forth over the thick rugs of the bateau floor. And he knew, even as he struggled to bring them back, that the old thrill and the old desire were gone. It was impossible to lie to himself. St. Pierre, in this moment, was of more importance to him than Roger Audemard. And St. Pierre's wife, Marie-Anne——

His eyes fell on the crumpled handkerchief on the piano keys. Again he was crushing it in the palm of his hand, and again the flood of humiliation and shame swept over him. He dropped the handkerchief, and the great law of his own life seemed to rise up in his face and taunt him. He was clean. That had been his greatest pride. He hated the man who was unclean. It was his instinct to kill the man who desecrated another man's home. And here, in the sacredness of St. Pierre's paradise, he found himself at last face to face with that greatest fight of all the ages.

He faced the door. He threw back his shoulders until they snapped, and he laughed, as if at the thing that had risen up to point its finger at him. After all, it did not hurt a man to go through a bit of fire—if he came out of it unburned. And deep in his heart he knew it was not a sin to love, even as he loved, if he kept that love to himself. What he had done when Marie-Anne stood at the window he could not undo. St. Pierre would probably have killed him for touching her hair with his lips, and he would not have blamed St. Pierre. But she had not felt that stolen caress. No one knew—but himself. And he was happier because of it. It was a sort of sacred thing, even though it brought the heat of shame into his face.

He went to the door, opened it, and stood out in the sunshine. It was good to feel the warmth of the sun in his face again and the sweet air of the open day in his lungs. The bateau was free of the shore and

drifting steadily towards midstream. Bateese was at the great birchwood rudder sweep, and to David's surprise he nodded in a friendly way, and his wide mouth broke into a grin.

"Ah, it is coming soon, that fight of ours, little *coq de bruyère!*" he chuckled gloatingly. "An' ze fight will be jus' lak that, m'sieu—you ze little fool-hen's rooster, ze partridge, an' I, Concombre Bateese, ze eagle!"

The anticipation in the half-breed's eyes reflected itself for an instant in David's. He turned back into the cabin, bent over his pack, and found among his clothes two pairs of boxing gloves. He fondled them with the loving touch of a brother and comrade, and their velvety smoothness was more soothing to his nerves than the cigar he was smoking. His one passion above all others was boxing, and wherever he went, either on pleasure or adventure, the gloves went with him. In many a cabin and shack of the far hinterland he had taught white men and Indians how to use them, so that he might have the pleasure of feeling the thrill of them on his hands. And now here was Concombre Bateese inviting him on, waiting for him to get well!

He went out and dangled the clumsy-looking mittens under the half-breed's nose.

Bateese looked at them curiously. *"Mitaines,"* he nodded. "Does ze little partridge rooster keep his

claws warm in those in ze winter? They are clumsy, m'sieu. I can make a better mitten of caribou skin."

Putting on one of the gloves, David doubled up his fist. "Do you see that, Concombre Bateese?" he asked. "Well, I will tell you this, that they are not mittens to keep your hands warm. I am going to fight you in them when our time comes. With these mittens I will fight you and your naked fists. Why? Because I do not want to hurt you too badly, friend Bateese! I do not want to break your face all to pieces, which I would surely do if I did not put on these soft mittens. Then, when you have really learned to fight——"

The bull neck of Concombre Bateese looked as if it were about to burst. His eyes seemed ready to pop out of their sockets, and suddenly he let out a roar. "What!—You dare talk lak that to Concombre Bateese, w'at is great'st fightin' man on all T'ree River? You talk lak that to me, Concombre Bateese, who will kill ze bear wit' hees han's, who pull down ze tree, who—who——"

The word-flood of his outraged dignity sprang to his lips; emotion choked him, and then, looking suddenly over Carrigan's shoulder—he stopped. Something in his look made David turn. Three paces behind him stood Marie-Anne, and he knew that from the corner of the cabin she had heard what had passed between them. She was biting her lips, and behind the flash of her eyes he saw laughter.

"You must not quarrel, children," she said. "Bateese, you are steering badly."

She reached out her hands, and without a word David gave her the gloves. With her palm and fingers she caressed them softly, yet David saw little lines of doubt come into her white forehead.

"They are pretty—and soft, M'sieu David. Surely they can not hurt much! Some day when St. Pierre comes, will you teach me how to use them?"

"Always it is 'When St. Pierre comes,' " he replied. "Shall we be waiting long?"

"Two or three days, perhaps a little longer. Are you coming with me to the *proue,* m'sieu?"

She did not wait for his answer, but went ahead of him, dangling the two pairs of gloves at her side. David caught a last glimpse of the half-breed's face as he followed Marie-Anne around the end of the cabin. Bateese was making a frightful grimace and shaking his huge fist, but scarcely were they out of sight on the narrow footway that ran between the cabin and the outer timbers of the scow when a huge roar of laughter followed them. Bateese had not done laughing when they reached the *proue,* or bow-nest, a deck fully ten feet in length by eight in width, sheltered above by an awning, and comfortably arranged with chairs, several rugs, a small table, and, to David's amazement, a hammock. He had never seen anything like this on the Three Rivers, nor had he ever heard of a scow so large or so luxuriously appointed. Over his head, at the

tip of a flagstaff attached to the forward end of the cabin, floated the black and white pennant of St Pierre Boulain. And under this staff was a screened door which undoubtedly opened into the kitchenette which Marie-Anne had told him about. He made no effort to hide his surprise. But St. Pierre's wife seemed not to notice it. The puckery little lines were still in her forehead, and the laughter had faded out of her eyes. The tiny lines deepened as there came another wild roar of laughter from Bateese in the stern.

"Is it true that you have given your word to fight Bateese?" she asked.

"It is true, Marie-Anne. And I feel that Bateese is looking ahead joyously to the occasion."

"He is," she affirmed. "Last night he spread the news among all my people. Those who left to join St. Pierre this morning have taken the news with them, and there is a great deal of excitement and much betting. I am afraid you have made a bad promise. No man has offered to fight Bateese in three years—not even my great St. Pierre, who says that Concombre is more than a match for him."

"And yet they must have a little doubt, as there is betting, and it takes two to make a bet," chuckled David.

The lines went out of Marie-Anne's forehead, and a half-smile trembled on her red lips. "Yes, there is betting. But those who are for you are offering next

autumn's muskrat skins and frozen fish against lynx and fisher and marten. The odds are about thirty to one against you, M'sieu David!"

The look of pity which was clearly in her eyes brought a rush of blood to David's face. "If only I had something to wager!" he groaned.

"You must not fight. I shall forbid it!"

"Then Bateese and I will steal off into the forest and have it out by ourselves."

"He will hurt you badly. He is terrible, like a great beast, when he fights. He loves to fight and is always asking if there is not some one who will stand up to him. I think he would desert even me for a good fight. But you, M'sieu David——"

"I also love a fight," he admitted, unashamed.

St. Pierre's wife studied him thoughtfully for a moment. "With these?" she asked then, holding up the gloves.

"Yes, with those. Bateese may use his fists, but I shall use those, so that I shall not disfigure him permanently. His face is none too handsome as it is."

For another flash her lips trembled on the edge of a smile. Then she gave him the gloves, a bit troubled, and nodded to a chair with a deep, cushioned seat and wide arms. "Please make yourself comfortable, M'sieu David. I have something to do in the cabin and will return in a little while."

He wondered if she had gone back to settle the matter with Bateese at once, for it was clear that she

did not regard with favor the promised bout between himself and the half-breed. It was on the spur of a careless moment that he had promised to fight Bateese, and with little thought that it was likely to be carried out or that it would become a matter of importance with all of St. Pierre's brigade. He was evidently in for it, he told himself, and as a fighting man it looked as though Concombre Bateese was at least the equal of his braggadocio. He was glad of that. He grinned as he watched the bending backs of St. Pierre's men. So they were betting thirty to one against him! Even St. Pierre might be induced to bet—with *him*. And if he did——

The hot blood leaped for a moment in Carrigan's veins. The thrill went to the tips of his fingers. He stared out over the river, unseeing, as the possibilities of the thing that had come into his mind made him for a moment oblivious of the world. He possessed one thing against which St. Pierre and St. Pierre's wife would wager a half of all they owned in the world! And if he should gamble that one thing, which had come to him like an inspiration, and should whip Bateese——

He began to pace back and forth over the narrow deck, no longer watching the rowers or the shore. The thought grew, and his mind was consumed by it. Thus far, from the moment the first shot was fired at him from the ambush, he had been playing with adventure in the dark. But fate had at last dealt him

a trump card. That something which he possessed was more precious than furs or gold to St. Pierre, and St. Pierre would not refuse the wager when it was offered. He would not dare refuse. More than that, he would accept eagerly, strong in the faith that Bateese would whip him as he had whipped all other fighters who had come up against him along the Three Rivers. And when Marie-Anne knew what that wager was to be, she, too, would pray for the gods of chance to be with Concombre Bateese!

He did not hear the light footsteps behind him, and when he turned suddenly in his pacing, he found himself facing Marie-Anne, who carried in her hands the little basket he had seen on the cabin table. She seated herself in the hammock and took from the basket a bit of lace work. For a moment he watched her fingers flashing in and out with the needles.

Perhaps his thought went to her. He was almost frightened as he saw her cheeks coloring under the long, dark lashes. He faced the rivermen again, and while he gripped at his own weakness, he tried to count the flashings of their oars. And behind him, the beautiful eyes of St. Pierre's wife were looking at him with a strange glow in their depths.

"Do you know," he said, speaking slowly and still looking toward the flashing of the oars, "something tells me that unexpected things are going to happen when St. Pierre returns. I am going to make a bet with him that I can whip Bateese. He will not refuse.

He will accept. And St. Pierre will lose, because I shall whip Bateese. It is then that these unexpected things will begin to happen. And I am wondering—after they do happen—if you will care so very much?"

There was a moment of silence. And then, "I don't want you to fight Bateese," she said.

The needles were working swiftly when he turned toward her again, and a second time the long lashes shadowed what a moment before he might have seen in her eyes.

XIII

THE morning passed like a dream to Carrigan. He permitted himself to live and breathe it as one who finds himself for a space in the heart of a golden mirage. He was sitting so near Marie-Anne that now and then the faint perfume of her came to him like the delicate scent of a flower. It was a breath of crushed violets, sweet as the air he was breathing, violets gathered in the deep cool of the forest, a whisper of sweetness about her, as if on her bosom she wore always the living flowers. He fancied her gathering them last bloom-time, a year ago, alone, her feet seeking out the damp mosses, her little fingers plucking the smiling and laughing faces of the violet flowers to be treasured away in fragrant sachets, as gentle as the wood-thrush's note, compared with the bottled aromas fifteen hundred miles south. It seemed to be a physical part of her, a thing born of the glow in her cheeks, a living exhalation of her soft red lips—and yet only when he was near, very near, did the life of it reach him.

She did not know he was thinking these things. There was nothing in his voice, he thought, to betray him. He was sure she was unconscious of the fight he

was making. Her eyes smiled and laughed with him, she counted her stitches, her fingers worked, and she talked to him as she might have talked to a friend of St. Pierre's. She told him how St. Pierre had made the barge, the largest that had ever been on the river and that he had built it entirely of dry cedar, so that it floated like a feather wherever there was water enough to run a York boat. She told him how St. Pierre had brought the piano down from Edmonton, and how he had saved it from pitching in the river by carrying the full weight of it on his shoulders when they met with an accident in running through a dangerous rapids bringing it down. St. Pierre was a very strong man, she said, a note of pride in her voice. And then she added,

"Sometimes, when he picks me up in his arms, I feel that he is going to squeeze the life out of me!"

Her words were like a sharp thrust into his heart. For an instant they painted a vision for him, a picture of that slim and adorable creature crushed close in the great arms of St. Pierre, so close that she could not breathe. In that mad moment of his hurt it was almost a living, breathing reality for him there on the golden fore-deck of the scow. He turned his face toward the far shore, where the wilderness seemed to reach off into eternity. What a glory it was—the green seas of spruce and cedar and balsam, the ridges of poplar and birch rising like silvery spume above the darker billows, and afar off, mellowed in the sun-

mists, the guardian crests of Trout Mountains sentineling the country beyond! Into that mystery-land on the farther side of the Wabiskaw waterways Carrigan would have loved to set his foot four days ago. It was that mystery of the unpeopled places that he most desired, their silence, the comradeship of spaces untrod by the feet of man. And now, what a fool he was! Through vast distances the forests he loved seemed to whisper it to him, and ahead of him the river seemed to look back, nodding over its shoulder, beckoning to him, telling him the word of the forests was true. It streamed on lazily, half a mile wide, as if resting for the splashing and roaring rush it would make among the rocks of the next rapids, and in its indolence it sang the low and everlasting song of deep and slowly passing water. In that song David heard the same whisper, that he was a fool! And the lure of the wilderness shores crept in on him and gripped him as of old. He looked at the rowers in the two York boats, and then his eyes came back to the end of the barge and to St. Pierre's wife.

Her little toes were tapping the floor of the deck. She, too, was looking out over the wilderness. And again it seemed to him that she was like a bird that wanted to fly.

"I should like to go into those hills," she said, without looking at him. "Away off yonder!"

"And I—I should like to go with you."

"You love all that, m'sieu?" she asked.

"Yes, madame!"

"Why 'madame,' when I have given you permission to call me 'Marie-Anne'?" she demanded.

"Because you call me 'm'sieu'."

"But you—you have not given me permission——"

"Then I do now," he interrupted quickly.

"*Merci!* I have wondered why you did not return the courtesy," she laughed softly. "I do not like the m'sieu. I shall call you 'David'!"

She rose out of the hammock suddenly and dropped her needles and lace work into the little basket. "I have forgotten something. It is for you to eat when it comes dinner-time, m'sieu—I mean David. So I must turn *fille de cuisine* for a little while. That is what St. Pierre sometimes calls me, because I love to play at cooking. I am going to bake a pie!"

The dark-screened door of the kitchenette closed behind her, and Carrigan walked out from under the awning, so that the sun beat down upon him. There was no longer a doubt in his mind. He was more than fool. He envied St. Pierre, and he coveted that which St. Pierre possessed. And yet, before he would take what did not belong to him, he knew he would put a pistol to his head and blow his life out. He was confident of himself there. Yet he had fallen, and out of the mire into which he had sunk he knew also that he must drag himself, and quickly, or be everlastingly lowered in his own esteem. He stripped himself naked

and did not lie to that other and greater thing of life that was in him.

He was not only a fool, but a coward. Only a coward would have touched the hair of St. Pierre's wife with his lips; only a coward would have let live the thoughts that burned in his brain. She was St. Pierre's wife—and he was anxious now for the quick homecoming of the chief of the Boulains. After that everything would happen quickly. He thanked God that the inspiration of the wager had come to him. After the fight, after he had won, then once more would he be the old Dave Carrigan, holding the trump hand in a thrilling game.

Loud voices from the York boats ahead and answering cries from Bateese in the stern drew him to the open deck. The bateau was close to shore, and the half-breed was working the long stern sweep as if the power of a steam-engine was in his mighty arms. The York boats had shortened their towline and were pulling at right angles within a few yards of a gravelly beach. A few strokes more, and men who were bare to the knees jumped out into shallow water and began tugging at the tow rope with their hands. David looked at his watch. It was ten o'clock. Never in his life had time passed so swiftly as that morning on the forward deck of the barge. And now they were tying up, after a drop of six or eight miles down the river, and he wondered how swiftly St. Pierre was overtaking them with his raft.

He was filled with the desire to feel the soft crush of the earth under his feet again, and not waiting for the long plank that Bateese was already swinging from the scow to the shore, he made a leap that put him on the sandy beach. St. Pierre's wife had given him this permission, and he looked to see what effect his act had on the half-breed. The face of Concombre Bateese was like sullen stone. Not a sound came from his thick lips, but in his eyes was a deep and dangerous fire as he looked at Carrigan. There was no need for words. In them were suspicion, warning, the deadly threat of what would happen if he did not come back when it was time to return. David nodded. He understood. Even though St. Pierre's wife had faith in him, Bateese had not. He passed between the men, and to a man their faces turned on him, and in their quiet and watchful eyes he saw again that warning and suspicion, the unspoken threat of what would happen if he forgot his promise to Marie-Anne Boulain. Never, in a single outfit, had he seen such splendid men. They were not a mongrel assortment of the lower country. Slim, tall, clean-cut, sinewy—they were stock of the old *voyageurs* of a hundred years ago, and all of them were young. The older men had gone to St. Pierre. The reason for this dawned upon Carrigan. Not one of these twelve but could beat him in a race through the forest; not one that could not outrun him and cut him off though he had hours the start!

Passing beyond them, he paused and looked back at

the bateau. On the forward deck stood Marie-Anne, and she, too, was looking at him now. Even at that distance he saw that her face was quiet and troubled with anxiety. She did not smile when he lifted his hat to her, but gave only a little nod. Then he turned and buried himself in the green balsams that grew within fifty paces of the river. The old joy of life leaped into him as his feet crushed in the soft moss of the shaded places where the sun did not break through. He went on, passing through a vast and silent cathedral of spruce and cedar so dense that the sky was hidden, and came then to higher ground, where the evergreen was sprinkled with birch and poplar. About him was an invisible choir of voices, the low twittering of timid little gray-backs, the song of hidden warblers, the scolding of distant jays. Big-eyed moose-birds stared at him as he passed, fluttering so close to his face that they almost touched his shoulders in their foolish inquisitiveness. A porcupine crashed within a dozen feet of his trail. And then he came to a beaten path, and other paths worn deep in the cool, damp earth by the hoofs of moose and caribou. Half a mile from the bateau he sat down on a rotting log and filled his pipe with fresh tobacco, while he listened to catch the subdued voice of the life in this land that he loved.

It was then that the curious feeling came over him that he was not alone, that other eyes than those of beast and bird were watching him. It was an impression that grew on him. He seemed to feel their stare,

seeking him out from the darkest coverts, waiting for him to shove on, dogging him like a ghost. Within him the hound-like instincts of the man-hunter rose swiftly to the suspicion of invisible presence.

He began to note the changes in the cries of certain birds. A hundred yards on his right a jay, most talkative of all the forest things, was screeching with a new note in its voice. On the other side of him, in a dense pocket of poplar and spruce, a warbler suddenly brought its song to a jerky end. He heard the excited *Pe-wee—Pe-wee—Pe-wee* of a startled little gray-back giving warning of an unwelcome intruder near its nest. And he rose to his feet, laughing softly as he thumbed down the tobacco in his pipe. Jeanne Marie-Anne Boulain might believe in him, but Bateese and her wary henchmen had ways of their own of strengthening their faith.

It was close to noon when he turned back, and he did not return by the moose path. Deliberately he struck out a hundred yards on either side of it, traveling where the moss grew thick and the earth was damp and soft. And five times he found the moccasin-prints of men.

Bateese, with his sleeves up, was scrubbing the deck of the bateau when David came over the plank.

"There are moose and caribou in there, but I fear I disturbed your hunters," said Carrigan, grinning at the half-breed. "They are too clumsy to hunt well, so clumsy that even the birds give them away. I am afraid we shall go without fresh meat tomorrow!"

Concombre Bateese stared as if some one had stunned him with a blow, and he spoke no word as David went on to the forward deck. Marie-Anne had come out under the awning. She gave a little cry of relief and pleasure.

"I am glad you have come back, M'sieu David!"

"So am I, madame," he replied. "I think the woods are unhealthful to travel in!"

Out of the earth he felt that a part of the old strength had returned to him. Alone they sat at dinner, and Marie-Anne waited on him and called him David again —and he found it easier now to call her Marie-Anne and look into her eyes without fear that he was betraying himself. A part of the afternoon he spent in her company, and it was not difficult for him to tell her something of his adventuring in the north, and how, body and soul, the northland had claimed him, and that he hoped to die in it when his time came. Her eyes glowed at that. She told him of two years she had spent in Montreal and Quebec, of her homesickness, her joy when she returned to her forests. It seemed, for a time, that they had forgotten St. Pierre. They did not speak of him. Twice they saw André, the Broken Man, but the name of Roger Audemard was not spoken. And a little at a time she told him of the hidden paradise of the Boulains away up in the unmapped wildernesses of the Yellowknife beyond the Great Bear, and of the great log château that was her home.

A part of the afternoon he spent on shore. He filled

a moosehide bag full of sand and suspended it from the limb of a tree, and for three-quarters of an hour pommeled it with his fists, much to the curiosity and amusement of St. Pierre's men, who could see nothing of man-fighting in these antics. But the exercise assured David that he had lost but little of his strength and that he would be in form to meet Bateese when the time came. Toward evening Marie-Anne joined him, and they walked for half an hour up and down the beach. It was Bateese who got supper. And after that Carrigan sat with Marie-Anne on the foredeck of the barge and smoked another of St. Pierre's cigars.

The camp of the rivermen was two hundred yards below the bateau, screened between by a finger of hardwood, so that except when they broke into a chorus of laughter or strengthened their throats with snatches of song, there was no sound of their voices. But Bateese was in the stern, and Nepapinas was forever flitting in and out among the shadows on the shore, like a shadow himself, and André, the Broken Man, hovered near as night came on. At last he sat down in the edge of the white sand of the beach, and there he remained, a silent and lonely figure, as the twilight deepened. Over the world hovered a sleepy quiet. Out of the forest came the droning of the wood-crickets, the last twitterings of the day birds, and the beginning of night sounds. A great shadow floated out over the river close to the bateau, the first of the questing, blood-

seeking owls adventuring out like pirates from their hiding-places of the day. One after another, as the darkness thickened, the different tribes of the people of the night answered the summons of the first stars. A mile down the river a loon gave its harsh love-cry; far out of the west came the faint trail-song of a wolf; in the river the night-feeding trout splashed like the tails of beaver; over the roof of the wilderness came the coughing, moaning challenge of a bull moose that yearned for battle. And over these same forest tops rose the moon, the stars grew thicker and brighter, and through the finger of hardwood glowed the fire of St. Pierre Boulain's men—while close beside him, silent in these hours of silence, David felt growing nearer and still nearer to him the presence of St. Pierre's wife.

On the strip of sand André, the Broken Man, rose and stood like the stub of a misshapen tree. And then slowly he moved on and was swallowed up in the mellow glow of the night.

"It is at night that he seeks," said St. Pierre's wife, for it was as if David had spoken the thought that was in his mind.

David, for a moment, was silent. And then he said, "You asked me to tell you about Black Roger Audemard. I will, if you care to have me. Do you?"

He saw the nodding of her head, though the moon and star-mist veiled her face.

"Yes. What do the Police say about Roger Audemard?"

He told her. And not once in the telling of the story did she speak or move. It was a terrible story at best, he thought, but he did not weaken it by smoothing over the details. This was his opportunity. He wanted her to know why he must possess the body of Roger Audemard, if not alive, then dead, and he wanted her to understand how important it was that he learn more about André, the Broken Man.

"He was a fiend, this Roger Audemard," he began. "A devil in man shape, afterward called 'Black Roger' because of the color of his soul."

Then he went on. He described Hatchet River Post, where the tragedy had happened; then told of the fight that came about one day between Roger Audemard and the factor of the post and his two sons. It was an unfair fight; he conceded that—three to one was cowardly in a fight. But it could not excuse what happened afterward. Audemard was beaten. He crept off into the forest, almost dead. Then he came back one stormy night in the winter with three strange friends. Who the friends were the Police never learned. There was a fight, but all through the fight Black Roger Audemard cried out not to kill the factor and his sons. In spite of that one of the sons was killed. Then the terrible thing happened. The father and his remaining son were bound hand and foot and fastened in the ancient dungeon room under the Post building. Then Black Roger set the building on fire, and stood outside in the storm and laughed like a mad-

man at the dying shrieks of his victims. It was the season when the trappers were on their lines, and there were but few people at the post. The company clerk and one other attempted to interfere, and Black Roger killed them with his own hands. Five deaths that night —two of them horrible beyond description!

Resting for a moment, Carrigan went on to tell of the long years of unavailing search made by the Police after that; how Black Roger was caught once and killed his captor. Then came the rumor that he was dead, and rumor grew into official belief, and the Police no longer hunted for his trails. Then, not long ago, came the discovery that Black Roger was still living, and he, Dave Carrigan, was after him.

For a time there was silence after he had finished. Then St. Pierre's wife rose to her feet. "I wonder," she said in a low voice, "what Roger Audemard's own story might be if he were here to tell it?"

She stepped out from under the awning, and in the full radiance of the moon he saw the pale beauty of her face and the crowning luster of her hair.

"Good night!" she whispered.

"Good night!" said David.

He listened until her retreating footsteps died away, and for hours after that he had no thought of sleep. He had insisted that she take possession of her cabin again, and Bateese had brought out a bundle of blankets. These he spread under the awning, and

when he drowsed off, it was to dream of the lovely face he had seen last in the glow of the moon.

It was in the afternoon of the fourth day that two things happened—one that he had prepared himself for, and another so unexpected that for a space it sent his world crashing out of its orbit. With St. Pierre's wife he had gone again to the ridge-line for flowers, half a mile back from the river. Returning a new way, they came to a shallow stream, and Marie-Anne stood at the edge of it, and there was laughter in her shining eyes as she looked to the other side of it. She had twined flowers into her hair. Her cheeks were rich with color. Her slim figure was exquisite in its wild pulse of life.

Suddenly she turned on him, her red lips smiling their witchery in his face. "You must carry me across," she said.

He did not answer. He was a-tremble as he drew near her. She raised her arms a little, waiting. And then he picked her up. She was against his breast. Her two hands went to his shoulders as he waded into the stream; he slipped, and they clung a little tighter. The soft note of laughter was in her throat when the current came to his knees out in the middle of the stream. He held her tighter; and then stupidly, he slipped again, and the movement brought her lower in his arms, so that for a space her head was against his breast and his face was crushed in the soft masses of her hair. He came with her that way to the op-

posite shore and stood her on her feet again, standing back quickly so that she would not hear the pounding of his heart. Her face was radiantly beautiful, and she did not look at David, but away from him.

"Thank you," she said.

And then, suddenly, they heard running feet behind them, and in another moment one of the brigade men came dashing through the stream. At the same time there came from the river a quarter of a mile away a thunderous burst of voice. It was not the voice of a dozen men, but of half a hundred, and Marie-Anne grew tense, listening, her eyes on fire even before the messenger could get the words out of his mouth.

"It is St. Pierre!" he cried then. "He has come with the great raft, and you must hurry if you would reach the bateau before he lands!"

In that moment it seemed to David that Marie-Anne forgot he was alive. A little cry came to her lips, and then she left him, running swiftly, saying no word to him, flying with the speed of a fawn to St. Pierre Boulain! And when David turned to the man who had come up behind them, there was a strange smile on the lips of the lithe-limbed forest-runner as his eyes followed the hurrying figure of St. Pierre's wife.

Until she was out of sight he stood in silence and then he said:

"Come, m'sieu. We, also, must meet St. Pierre!"

XIV

DAVID moved slowly behind the brigade man. He had no desire to hurry. He did not wish to see what happened when Marie-Anne met St. Pierre Boulain. Only a moment ago she had been in his arms; her hair had smothered his face; her hands had clung to his shoulders; her flushed cheeks and long lashes had for an instant lain close against his breast. And now, swiftly, without a word of apology, she was running away from him to meet her husband.

He almost spoke that word aloud as he saw the last of her slim figure among the silver birches. She was going to the man to whom she belonged, and there was no hesitation in the manner of her going. She was glad. And she was entirely forgetful of him, Dave Carrigan, in that gladness.

He quickened his steps, narrowing the distance between him and the hurrying brigade man. Only the diseased thoughts in his brain had made the happening in the creek anything but an accident. It was all an accident, he told himself. Marie-Anne had asked him to carry her across just as she would have asked any one of her rivermen. It was his fault, and not hers, that he had slipped in mid-stream, and that his

arms had closed tighter about her, and that her hair had brushed his face. He remembered she had laughed, when it seemed for a moment that they were going to fall into the stream together. Probably she would tell St. Pierre all about it. Surely she would never guess it had been nearer tragedy than comedy for him.

Once more he was convinced he had proved himself a weakling and a fool. His business now was with St. Pierre, and the hour was at hand when the game had ceased to be a woman's game. He had looked ahead to this hour. He had prepared himself for it and had promised himself action that would be both quick and decisive. And yet, as he went on, his heart was still thumping unsteadily, and in his arms and against his face remained still the sweet, warm thrill of his contact with Marie-Anne. He could not drive that from him. It would never completely go. As long as he lived, what had happened in the creek would live with him. He did not deny that crying voice inside him. It was easy for his mouth to make words. He could call himself a fool and a weakling, but those words were purely mechanical, hollow, meaningless. The truth remained. It was a blazing fire in his breast, a conflagration that might easily get the best of him, a thing which he must fight and triumph over for his own salvation. He did not think of danger for Marie-Anne, for such a thought was inconceivable. The tragedy was one-sided. It was his own folly, his

own danger. For just as he loved Marie-Anne, so did she love her husband, St. Pierre.

He came to the low ridge close to the river and climbed up through the thick birches and poplars. At the top was a bald knob of sandstone, over which the riverman had already passed. David paused there and looked down on the broad sweep of the Athabasca.

What he saw was like a picture spread out on the great breast of the river and the white strip of shoreline. Still a quarter of a mile upstream, floating down slowly with the current, was a mighty raft, and for a space his eyes took in nothing else. On the Mackenzie, the Athabasca, the Saskatchewan, and the Peace he had seen many rafts, but never a raft like this of St. Pierre Boulain. It was a hundred feet in width and twice and a half times as long, and with the sun blazing down upon it from out of a cloudless sky it looked to him like a little city swept up from out of some archaic and savage desert land to be transplanted to the river. It was dotted with tents and canvas shelters. Some of these were gray, and some were white, and two or three were striped with broad bands of yellow and red. Behind all these was a cabin, and over this there rose a slender staff from which floated the black and white pennant of St. Pierre. The raft was alive. Men were running between the tents. The long rudder sweeps were flashing in the sun. Rowers with naked arms and shoulders were straining their muscles in four York boats that were pulling like ants at the giant

mass of timber. And to David's ears came a deep monotone of human voices, the chanting of the men as they worked.

Nearer to him a louder response suddenly made answer to it. A dozen steps carried him round a projecting thumb of brush, and he could see the open shore where the bateau was tied. Marie-Anne had crossed the strip of sand, and Bateese was helping her into a waiting York boat. Then Bateese shoved it off, and the four men in it began to row. Two canoes were already half-way to the raft, and David recognized the occupant of one of them as André, the Broken Man. Then he saw Marie-Anne rise in the York boat and wave something white in her hand.

He looked again toward the raft. The current and the sweeps and the tugging boats were drawing it steadily nearer. Standing at the very edge of it he saw now a solitary figure, and in the clear sunlight the man stood out clean-cut as a carven statue. He was a giant in size. His head and arms were bare, and he was looking steadily toward the bateau and the approaching York boat. He raised an arm, and a moment later the movement was followed by a voice that rose above all other voices. It boomed over the river like the rumble of a gun. In response to it Marie-Anne waved the white thing in her hand, and David thought he heard her voice in an answering cry. He stared again at the solitary figure of the man, seeing nothing else, hearing no other sound but the booming of the

deep cry that came again over the river. His heart was thumping. In his eyes was a gathering fire. His body grew tense. For he knew that at last he was looking at St. Pierre, chief of the Boulains, and husband of the woman he loved.

As the significance of the situation grew upon him, a flash of his old humor returned. It was the same grim humor that had possessed him behind the rock, when he had thought he was going to die. Fate had played him a dishonest turn then, and it was doing the same thing by him now. Unless he deliberately turned his face away, he was going to see the reunion of Marie-Anne and St. Pierre.

Yesterday he had strapped his binoculars to his belt. Today Marie-Anne had looked through them a dozen times. They had been a source of pleasure and thrill to her. Now, David thought, they would be good medicine for him. He would see the whole thing through, and at close range. He would leave himself no room for doubt. He had laughed behind the rock, when bullets were zipping close to his head, and the same grim smile came to his lips now as he focused his glasses on the solitary figure at the head of the raft.

The smile died away when he saw St. Pierre. It was as if he could reach out and touch him with his hand. And never, he thought, had he seen such a man. A moment before, a flashing vision had come to him from out of an Arabian desert; the multitude of

colored tents, the half-naked men, the great raft floating almost without perceptible motion on the placid breast of the river had stirred his imagination until he saw a strange picture. But there was nothing Arabic, nothing desert-like, in this man his binoculars brought within a few feet of his eyes. He was more like a viking pirate who had roved the sea a few centuries ago. One great, bare arm was raised as David looked, and his booming voice was rolling over the river again. His hair was shaggy, and untrimmed, and red; he wore a short beard that glistened in the sun—he was laughing as he waved and shouted to Marie-Anne—a joyous, splendid giant of a man who seemed almost on the point of leaping into the water in his eagerness to clasp in his naked arms the woman who was coming to him.

David drew a deep breath, and there came an unconscious tightening at his heart as he turned his glasses upon Marie-Anne. She was still standing in the bow of the York boat, and her back was toward him. He could see the glisten of the sun in her hair. She was waving her handkerchief, and the poise of her slim body told him that in her eagerness she would have darted from the bow of the boat had she possessed wings.

Again he looked at St. Pierre. And this was the man who was no match for Concombre Bateese! It was inconceivable. Yet he heard Marie-Anne's voice repeating those very words in his ear. But she had surely been joking with him. She had been storing up this

little surprise for him. She had wanted him to discover with his own eyes what a splendid man was this chief of the Boulains. And yet, as David stared, there came to him an unpleasant thought of the incongruity of this thing he was looking upon. It struck upon him like a clashing discord, the fact of matehood between these two—a condition inconsistent and out of tune with the beautiful things he had built up in his mind about the woman. In his soul he had enshrined her as a lovely wildflower, easily crushed, easily destroyed, a sweet treasure to be guarded from all that was rough and savage, a little violet-goddess as fragile as she was brave and loyal. And St. Pierre, standing there at the edge of his raft, looked as if he had come up out of the caves of a million years ago! There was something barbaric about him. He needed only a club and a shield and the skin of a beast about his loins to transform him into prehistoric man. At least these were his first impressions—impressions roused by thought of Marie-Anne's slim, beautiful body crushed close in the embrace of that laughing, powerful-lunged giant. Then the reaction swept over him. St. Pierre was not a monster, even though his disturbed mind unconsciously made an effort to conceive him as such. There were gladness and laughter in his face. There was the contagion of joy and good cheer in the voice that boomed over the water. Laughter and shouts answered it from the shore. The rowers in Marie-Anne's York boat burst into a wild and exultant snatch of song and made their oars fairly crack. There came

a solitary yell from André, the Broken Man, who was close to the head of the raft now. And from the raft itself came a slowly swelling volume of sound, the urge and voice and exultation of red-blooded men a-thrill with the glory of this day and the wild freedom of their world. The truth came to David. St. Pierre Boulain was the beloved Big Brother of his people.

He waited, his muscles tense, his jaws set tight. Good medicine, he called it again, a righteous sort of punishment set upon him for the moral cowardice he had betrayed in falling down in worship at the feet of another man's wife. The York boat was very close to the head of the raft now. He saw Marie-Anne herself fling a rope to St. Pierre. Then the boat swung alongside. In another moment St. Pierre had leaned over, and Marie-Anne was with him on the raft. For a space everything else in the world was obliterated for David. He saw St. Pierre's arms gather the slim form into their embrace. He saw Marie-Anne's hands go up fondly to the bearded face. And then——

Carrigan cut the picture there. He turned his shoulder to the raft and snapped the binoculars in the case at his belt. Some one was coming in his direction from the bateau. It was the riverman who had brought to Marie-Anne the news of St. Pierre's arrival. David went down to meet him. From the foot of the ridge he again turned his eyes in the direction of the raft. St. Pierre and Marie-Anne were just about to enter the little cabin built in the center of the drifting mass of timber.

XV

IT was easy for Carrigan to guess why the river-man had turned back for him. Men were busy about the bateau, and Concombre Bateese stood in the stern, a long pole in his hands, giving commands to the others. The bateau was beginning to swing out into the stream when he leaped aboard. A wide grin spread over the half-breed's face. He eyed David keenly and laughed in his deep chest, an unmistakable suggestiveness in the note of it.

"You look seek, m'sieu," he said in an undertone, for David's ears alone. "You look ver' unhappy, an' pale lak leetle boy! W'at happen w'en you look t'rough ze glass up there, eh? Or ees it zat you grow frighten because ver' soon you stan' up an' fight Concombre Bateese? Eh, *coq de bruyère?* Ees it zat?"

A quick thought came to David. "Is it true that St. Pierre can not whip you, Bateese?"

Bateese threw out his chest with a mighty intake of breath. Then he exploded: "No man on all T'ree River can w'ip Concombre Bateese."

"And St. Pierre is a powerful man," mused David, letting his eyes travel slowly from the half-breed's moccasined feet to the top of his head. "I measured

him well through the glasses, Bateese. It will be a great fight. But I shall whip you!"

He did not wait for the half-breed to reply, but went into the cabin and closed the door behind him. He did not like the taunting note of suggestiveness in the other's words. Was it possible that Bateese suspected the true state of his mind, that he was in love with the wife of St. Pierre, and that his heart was sick because of what he had seen aboard the raft? He flushed hotly. It made him uncomfortable to feel that even the half-breed might have guessed his humiliation.

David looked through the window toward the raft. The bateau was drifting downstream, possibly a hundred feet from the shore, but it was quite evident that Concombre Bateese was making no effort to bring it close to the floating mass of timber, which had made no change in its course down the river. David's mind painted swiftly what was happening in the cabin into which Marie-Anne and St. Pierre had disappeared. At this moment Marie-Anne was telling of him, of the adventure in the hot patch of sand. He fancied the suppressed excitement in her voice as she unburdened herself. He saw St. Pierre's face darken, his muscles tighten—and crouching in silence, he seemed to see the misshapen hulk of André, the Broken Man, listening to what was passing between the other two. And he heard again the mad monotone of André's voice, crying plaintively, "*Has any one seen Black Roger Audemard?*"

His blood ran a little faster, and his old craft was a dominantly living thing within him once more. Love had dulled both his ingenuity and his desire. For a space a thing had risen before him that was mightier than the majesty of the Law, and he had *tried* to miss the bull's-eye—because of his love for the wife of St. Pierre Boulain. Now he shot squarely for it, and the bell rang in his brain. Two times two again made four. Facts assembled themselves like arguments in flesh and blood. Those facts would have convinced Superintendent McVane, and they now convinced David. He had set out to get Black Roger Audemard, alive or dead. And Black Roger, wholesale murderer, a monster who had painted the blackest page of crime known in the history of Canadian law, was closely and vitally associated with Marie-Anne and St. Pierre Boulain!

The thing was a shock, but Carrigan no longer tried to evade the point. His business was no longer with a man supposed to be a thousand or fifteen hundred miles farther north. It was with Marie-Anne, St. Pierre, and André, the Broken Man. And also with Concombre Bateese.

He smiled a little grimly as he thought of his approaching battle with the half-breed. St. Pierre would be astounded at the proposition he had in store for him. But he was sure that St. Pierre would accept. And then, if he won the fight with Bateese——

The smile faded from his lips. His face grew older as he looked slowly about the bateau cabin, with its

sweet and lingering whispers of a woman's presence. It was a part of her. It breathed of her fragrance and her beauty; it seemed to be waiting for her, crying softly for her return. Yet once had there been another woman even lovelier than the wife of St. Pierre. He had not hesitated then. Without great effort he had triumphed over the loveliness of Carmin Fanchet and had sent her brother to the hangman. And now, as he recalled those days, the truth came to him that even in the darkest hour Carmin Fanchet had made not the slightest effort to buy him off with her beauty. She had not tried to lure him. She had fought proudly and defiantly. And had Marie-Anne done that? His fingers clenched slowly, and a thickening came in his throat. Would she tell St. Pierre of the many hours they had spent together? Would she confess to him the secret of that precious moment when she had lain close against his breast, her arms about him, her face pressed to his? Would she speak to him of secret hours, of warm flushes that had come to her face, of glowing fires that at times had burned in her eyes when he had been very near to her? Would she reveal *everything* to St. Pierre—her husband? He was powerless to combat the voice that told him no. Carmin Fanchet had fought him openly as an enemy and had not employed her beauty as a weapon. Marie-Anne had put in his way a great temptation. What he was thinking seemed to him like a sacrilege, yet he knew there could be no discriminating distinctions between

weapons, now that he was determined to play the game to the end, for the Law.

When Carrigan went out on deck, the half-breed was sweating from his exertion at the stern sweep. He looked at the *agent de police* who was going to fight him, perhaps tomorrow or the next day. There was a change in Carrigan. He was not the same man who had gone into the cabin an hour before, and the fact impressed itself upon Bateese. There was something in his appearance that held back the loose talk at the end of Concombre's tongue. And so it was Carrigan himself who spoke first.

"When will this man St. Pierre come to see me?" he demanded. "If he doesn't come soon, I shall go to him."

For an instant Concombre's face darkened. Then, as he bent over the sweep with his great back to David, he chuckled audibly, and said:

"Would you go, m'sieu? Ah—it is *le malade d'amour* over there in the cabin. Surely you would not break in upon their love-making?"

Bateese did not look over his shoulder, and so he did not see the hot flush that gathered in David's face. But David was sure he knew it was there and that Concombre had guessed the truth of matters. There was a sly note in his voice, as if he could not quite keep to himself his exultation that beauty and bright eyes had played a clever trick on this man who, if his own judgment had been followed, would now be resting peace-

fully at the bottom of the river. It was the final stab to Carrigan. His muscles tensed. For the first time he felt the desire to shoot a naked fist into the grinning mouth of Concombre Bateese. He laid a hand on the half-breed's shoulder, and Bateese turned about slowly. He saw what was in the other's eyes.

"Until this moment I have not known what a great pleasure it will be to fight you, Bateese," said David quietly. "Make it tomorrow—in the morning, if you wish. Take word to St. Pierre that I will make him a great wager that I win, a gamble so large that I think he will be afraid to cover it. For I don't think much of this St. Pierre of yours, Bateese. I believe him to be a big-winded bluff, like yourself. And also a coward. Mark my word, he will be so much afraid that he will not accept my wager!"

Bateese did not answer. He was looking over David's shoulder. He seemed not to have heard what the other had said, yet there had come a sudden gleam of exultation in his eyes, and he replied, still gazing toward the raft,

"*Diantre, m'sieu coq de bruyère* may keep ze beeg word in hees mout'! See!—St. Pierre, he ees comin' to answer for himself. *Mon Dieu,* I hope he does not wring ze leetle rooster's neck, for zat would spoil wan great, gran' fight tomorrow!"

David turned toward the big raft. At the distance which separated them he could make out the giant figure of St. Pierre Boulain getting into a canoe. The

humped-up form already in that canoe he knew was the Broken Man. He could not see Marie-Anne.

Very lightly Bateese touched his arm. "M'sieu will go into ze cabin," he suggested softly. "If somet'ing happens, it ees bes' too many eyes do not see it. You understan', *m'sieu agent de police?*"

Carrigan nodded. "I understand," he said.

XVI

IN the cabin David waited. He did not look through the window to watch St. Pierre's approach. He sat down and picked up a magazine from the table upon which Marie-Anne's work-basket lay. He was cool as ice now. His blood flowed evenly and his pulse beat unhurriedly. Never had he felt himself more his own master, more like grappling with a situation. St. Pierre was coming to fight. He had no doubt of that. Perhaps not physically, at first. But, one way or another, something dynamic was bound to happen in the bateau cabin within the next half-hour. Now that the impending drama was close at hand, Carrigan's scheme of luring St. Pierre into the making of a stupendous wager seemed to him rather ridiculous. With calculating coldness he was forced to concede that St. Pierre would be somewhat of a fool to accept the wager he had in mind, when he was so completely in St. Pierre's power. For Marie-Anne and the chief of the Boulains, the bottom of the river would undoubtedly be the best and easiest solution, and the half-breed's suggestion might be acted upon after all.

As his mind charged itself for the approaching struggle, David found himself staring at a double page

in the magazine, given up entirely to impossibly slim young creatures exhibiting certain bits of illusive and mysterious feminine apparel. Marie-Anne had expressed her approbation in the form of pencil notes under several of them. Under a cobwebby affair that wreathed one of the slim figures he read, "St. Pierre will love this!" There were two exclamation points after that particular notation!

David replaced the magazine on the table and looked toward the door. No, St. Pierre would not hesitate to put him at the bottom of the river, for *her*. Not if he, Dave Carrigan, made the solution of the matter a necessity. There were times, he told himself, when it was confoundedly embarrassing to force the letter of the law. And this was one of them. He was not afraid of the river bottom. He was thinking again of Marie-Anne.

The scraping of a canoe against the side of the bateau recalled him suddenly to the moment at hand. He heard low voices, and one of them, he knew, was St Pierre's. For an interval the voices continued, frequently so low that he could not distinguish them at all. For ten minutes he waited impatiently. Then the door swung open, and St. Pierre came in.

Slowly and coolly David rose to meet him, and at the same moment the chief of the Boulains closed the door behind him. There was no greeting in Carrigan's manner. He was the Law, waiting, unexcited, sure of himself, impassive as a thing of steel. He was ready

to fight. He expected to fight. It only remained for St. Pierre to show what sort of fight it was to be. And he was amazed at St. Pierre, without betraying that amazement. In the vivid light that shot through the western windows the chief of the Boulains stood looking at David. He wore a gray flannel shirt open at the throat, and it was a splendid throat David saw, and a splendid head above it, with its reddish beard and hair. But what he saw chiefly were St. Pierre's eyes. They were the sort of eyes he disliked to find in an enemy—a grayish, steely blue that reflected sunlight like polished flint. But there was no flash of battle-glow in them now. St. Pierre was neither excited nor in a bad humor. Nor did Carrigan's attitude appear to disturb him in the least. He was smiling; his eyes glowed with almost boyish curiosity as he stared appraisingly at David—and then, slowly, a low chuckle of laughter rose in his deep chest, and he advanced with an outstretched hand.

"I am St. Pierre Boulain," he said. "I have heard a great deal about you, Sergeant Carrigan. You have had an unfortunate time!"

Had the man advanced menacingly, David would have felt more comfortable. It was disturbing to have this giant come to him with an extended hand of apparent friendship when he had anticipated an entirely different sort of meeting. And St. Pierre was laughing at him! There was no doubt of that. And he had the colossal nerve to tell him that he had been unfortunate,

as though being shot up by somebody's wife was a fairly decent joke!

Carrigan's attitude did not change. He did not reach out a hand to meet the other. There was no responsive glimmer of humor in his eyes or on his lips. And seeing these things, St. Pierre turned his extended hand to the open box of cigars, so that he stood for a moment with his back toward him.

"It's funny," he said, as if speaking to himself, and with only a drawling note of the French *patois* in his voice. "I come home, find my Jeanne in a terrible mix-up, a stranger in her room—and the stranger refuses to let me laugh or shake hands with him. *Tonnerre,* I say it is funny! And my Jeanne saved his life, and made him muffins, and gave him my own bed, and walked with him in the forest! Ah, the ungrateful *cochon!*"

He turned, laughing openly, so that his deep voice filled the cabin. "*Vous avez de la corde de pendu, m'sieu*—yes, you are a lucky dog! For only one other man in the world would my Jeanne have done that. You are lucky because you were not ended behind the rock; you are lucky because you are not at the bottom of the river; you are lucky——"

He shrugged his big shoulders hopelessly. "And now, after all our kindness and your good luck, you wait for me like an enemy, m'sieu. *Diable,* I can not understand!"

For the life of him Carrigan could not, in these few

moments, measure up his man. He had said nothing. He had let St. Pierre talk. And now St. Pierre stood there, one of the finest men he had ever looked upon, as if honestly overcome by a great wonder. And yet behind that apparent incredulity in his voice and manner David sensed the deep underflow of another thing. St. Pierre was all that Marie-Anne had claimed for him, and more. She had given him assurance of her unlimited confidence that her husband could adjust any situation in the world, and Carrigan conceded that St. Pierre measured up splendidly to that particular type of man. The smile had not left his face; the good humor was still in his eyes.

David smiled back at him coldly. He recognized the cleverness of the other's play. St. Pierre was a man who would smile like that even as he fought, and Carrigan loved a smiling fighter, even when he had to slip steel bracelets over his wrists.

"I am Sergeant Carrigan, of 'N' Division, Royal Northwest Mounted Police," he said, repeating the formula of the law. "Sit down, St. Pierre, and I will tell you a few things that have happened. And then——"

"*Non, non,* it is not necessary, m'sieu. I have already listened for an hour, and I do not like to hear a story twice. You are of the Police. I love the Police. They are brave men, and brave men are my brothers. You are out after Roger Audemard, the rascal! Is it not so? And you were shot at behind the rock back

there. You were almost killed. *Ma foi,* and it was my Jeanne who did the shooting! Yes, she thought you were another man." The chuckling, drum-like note of laughter came again out of St. Pierre's great chest. "It was bad shooting. I have taught her better, but the sun was blinding there in the hot, white sand. And after that—I know everything that has happened. Bateese was wrong. I shall scold him for wanting to put you at the bottom of the river—perhaps. *Oui, ce que femme veut, Dieu le veut*—that is it. A woman must have her way, and my Jeanne's gentle heart was touched because you were a brave and handsome man, M'sieu Carrigan. But I am not jealous. Jealousy is a worm that does not make friendship! And we shall be friends. Only as a friend could I take you to the Château Boulain, far up on the Yellowknife. And we are going there."

In spite of what might have been the entirely proper thing to do at this particular moment, Carrigan's face broke into a smile as he drew a second chair up close to the table. He was swift to readjust himself. It came suddenly back to him how he had grinned behind the rock, when death seemed close at hand. And St. Pierre was like that now. David measured him again as the chief of the Boulains sat down opposite him. Such a man could not be afraid of anything on the face of the earth, even of the Law. The gleam that lay in his eyes told David that as they met his own over the table. "We are smiling now because it hap-

pens to please us," David read in them. "But in a moment, if it is necessary, we shall fight."

Carrigan leaned a little over the table. "You know we are not going to the Château Boulain, St. Pierre," he said. "We are going to stop at Fort McMurray, and there you and your wife must answer for a number of things that have happened. There is one way out—possibly. That is largely up to you. Why did your wife try to kill me behind the rock? And what did you know about Black Roger Audemard?"

St. Pierre's eyes did not for an instant leave Carrigan's face. Slowly a change came into them; the smile faded, the blue went out, and up from behind seemed to come another pair of eyes that were hard as steel and cold as ice. Yet they were not eyes that threatened, nor eyes that betrayed excitement or passion. And St. Pierre's voice, when he spoke, lacked the deep and vibrant note that had been in it. It was as if he had placed upon it the force of a mighty will, chaining it back, just as something hidden and terrible lay chained behind his eyes.

"Why play like little children, M'sieu Carrigan?" he asked. "Why not come out squarely, honestly, like men? I know what has happened. *Mon Dieu,* it was bad! You were almost killed, and you heard that poor wreck, André, call for Roger Audemard. My Jeanne has told you about that—how I found him in the forest with his broken mind and body. And about my Jeanne——" St. Pierre's fists grew into knotted lumps

on the table. "*Non,* I will die—I will kill you—before I will tell you why she shot at you behind the rock! We are men, both of us. We are not afraid. And you—in my place—what would *you* do, m'sieu?"

In the moment's silence each man looked steadily at the other.

"I would—fight," said David slowly. "If it was for her, I am pretty sure I would fight."

He believed that he was drawing the net in now, that it would catch St. Pierre. He leaned a little farther over the table.

"And I, too, must fight," he added. "You know our law, St. Pierre. We don't go back without our man—unless we happen to die. And I would be stupid if I did not understand the situation here. It would be quite easy for you to get rid of me. But I don't believe you are a murderer, even if your Jeanne tried to be." A flicker of a smile crossed his lips. "And Marie-Anne—I beg pardon!—your wife——"

St. Pierre interrupted him. "It will please me to have you call her Marie-Anne. And it will please her also, m'sieu. *Dieu,* if we only had eyes that could see what is in a woman's heart! Life is funny, m'sieu. It is a great joke, I swear it on my soul!"

He shrugged his shoulders, smiling again straight into David's eyes. "See what has happened! You set out for a murderer. My Jeanne makes a great mistake and shoots you. Then she pities you, saves your life, brings you here, and—*ma foi!* it is true—learns to care

for you more than she should! But that does not make me want to kill you. *Non,* her happiness is mine. Dead men tell no tales, m'sieu, but there are times when living men also keep tales to themselves. And that is what you are going to do, M'sieu Carrigan. You are going to keep to yourself the thing that happened behind the rock. You are going to keep to yourself the mumblings of our poor mad André. Never will they pass your lips. I know. I swear it. I stake my life on it!" St. Pierre was talking slowly and unexcitedly. There was an immeasurable confidence in his deep voice. It did not imply a threat or a warning. He was sure of himself. And his eyes had deepened into blue again and were almost friendly.

"You would stake your life?" repeated Carrigan questioningly. "You would do that?"

St. Pierre rose to his feet and looked about the cabin with a shining light in his eyes that was both pride and exaltation. He moved toward the end of the room, where the piano stood, and for a moment his big fingers touched the keys; then, seeing the lacy bit of handkerchief that lay there, he picked it up—and placed it back again. Carrigan did not urge his question, but waited. In spite of his effort to fight it down he found himself in the grip of a mysterious and growing thrill as he watched St. Pierre. Never had the presence of another man had the same effect upon him, and strangely the thought came to him that he was matched—even overmatched. It was as if St. Pierre

had brought with him into the cabin something more than the splendid strength of his body, a thing that reached out in the interval of silence between them, warning Carrigan that all the law in the world would not swerve the chief of the Boulains from what was already in his mind. For a moment the thought passed from David that fate had placed him up against the hazard of enmity with St. Pierre. His vision centered in the man alone. And as he, too, rose to his feet, an unconscious smile came to his lips as he recalled the boastings of Bateese.

"I ask you," said he, "if you would really stake your life in a matter such as that? Of course, if your words were merely accidental, and meant nothing——"

"If I had a dozen lives, I would stake them, one on top of the other, as I have said," interrupted St. Pierre. Suddenly his laugh boomed out and his voice became louder. "M'sieu Carrigan, I have come to offer you just that test! *Oui,* I could kill you now. I could put you at the bottom of the river, as Bateese thinks is right. *Mon Dieu,* how completely I could make you disappear! And then my Jeanne would be safe. She would not go behind prison bars. She would go on living, and laughing, and singing in the big forests, where she belongs. And Black Roger Audemard, the rascal, would be safe for a time! But that would be like destroying a little child. You are so helpless now. So you are going on to the Château Boulain with us, and if at the end of the second month from today you

do not willingly say I have won my wager—why—m'sieu—I will go with you into the forest, and you may shoot out of me the life which is my end of the gamble. Is that not fair? Can you suggest a better way—between men like you and me?"

"I can at least suggest a way that has the virtue of saving time," replied David. "First, however, I must understand my position here. I am, I take it, a prisoner."

"A guest, with certain restrictions placed upon you, m'sieu," corrected St. Pierre.

The eyes of the two men met on a dead level.

"Tomorrow morning I am going to fight Bateese," said David. "It is a little sporting event we have fixed up between us for the amusement of—your men. I have heard that Bateese is the best fighting man along the Three Rivers. And I—I do not like to have any other man claim that distinction when I am around."

For the first time St. Pierre's placidity seemed to leave him. His brow became clouded, a moment's frown grew in his face, and there was a certain disconsolate hopelessness in the shrug of his shoulders. It was as if Carrigan's words had suddenly robbed the day of all its sunshine for the chief of the Boulains. His voice, too, carried an unhappy and disappointed note as he made a gesture toward the window.

"M'sieu, on that raft out there are many of my men, and they have scarcely rested or slept since word was brought to them that a stranger was to fight Con-

combre Bateese. *Tonnerre,* they have gambled without ever seeing you until the clothes on their backs are in the hazard, and they have cracked their muscles in labor to overtake you! They have prayed away their very souls that it would be a good fight, and that Bateese would not eat you up too quickly. It has been a long time since we have seen a good fight, a long time since the last man dared to stand up against the half-breed. Ugh, it tears out my heart to tell you that the fight can not be!"

St. Pierre made no effort to suppress his emotion. He was like a huge, disappointed boy. He walked to the window, peered forth at the raft, and as he shrugged his big shoulders again something like a groan came from him.

The thrill of approaching triumph swept through David's blood. The flame of it was in his eyes when St. Pierre turned from the window.

"And you are disappointed, St. Pierre? You would like to see that fight!"

The blue steel in St. Pierre's eyes flashed back. "If the price were a year of my life, I would give it—if Bateese did not eat you up too quickly. I love to look upon a good fight, where there is no venom of hatred in the blows!"

"Then you shall see a good fight, St. Pierre."

"Bateese would kill you, m'sieu. You are not big. You are not his match."

"I shall whip him, St. Pierre—whip him until he avows me his master."

"You do not know the half-breed, m'sieu. Twice I have tried him in friendly combat myself and have been beaten."

"But I shall whip him," repeated Carrigan. "I will wager you anything—anything in the world—even life against life—that I whip him!"

The gloom had faded from the face of St. Pierre Boulain. But in a moment it clouded again.

"My Jeanne has made me promise that I will stop the fight," he said.

"And why—why should she insist in a matter such as this, which properly should be settled among men?" asked David.

Again St. Pierre laughed; with an effort, it seemed. "She is gentle-hearted, m'sieu. She laughed and thought it quite a joke when Bateese humbled me. 'What! My great St. Pierre, with the blood of old France in his veins, beaten by a man who has been named after a vegetable!' she cried. I tell you she was merry over it, m'sieu! She laughed until the tears came into her eyes. But with you it is different. She was white when she entreated me not to let you fight Bateese. Yes, she is afraid you will be badly hurt. And she does not want to see you hurt again. But I tell you that I am not jealous, m'sieu! She does not try to hide things from me. She tells me everything, like a little child. And so——"

"I am going to fight Bateese," said David. He wondered if St. Pierre could hear the thumping of his heart, or if his face gave betrayal of the hot flood it was pumping through his body. "Bateese and I have pledged ourselves. We shall fight, unless you tie one of us hand and foot. And as for a wager——"

"Yes—what have you to wager?" demanded St. Pierre eagerly.

"You know the odds are great," temporized Carrigan.

"That I concede, m'sieu."

"But a fight without a wager would be like a pipe without tobacco, St. Pierre."

"You speak truly, m'sieu."

David came nearer and laid a hand on the other's arm. "St. Pierre, I hope you—and your Jeanne—will understand what I am about to offer. It is this. If Bateese whips me, I will disappear into the forests, and no word shall ever pass my lips of what has passed since that hour behind the rock—and this. No whisper of it will ever reach the Law. I will forget the attempted murder and the suspicious mumblings of your Broken Man. You will be safe. Your Jeanne will be safe—if Bateese whips me."

He paused, and waited. St. Pierre made no answer, but amazement came into his face, and after that a slow and burning fire in his eyes which told how deeply and vitally Carrigan's words had struck into his soul.

"And if I should happen to win," continued David, turning a bit carelessly toward the window, "why, I should expect as large a payment from you. If I win, your fulfillment of the wager will be to tell me in every detail why your wife tried to kill me behind the rock, and you will also tell me all that you know about the man I am after, Black Roger Audemard. That is all. I am asking for no odds, though you concede the handicap is great."

He did not look at St. Pierre. Behind him he heard the other's deep breathing. For a space neither spoke. Outside they could hear the soft swish of water, the low voices of men in the stern, and a shout and the barking of a dog coming from the raft far out on the river. For David the moment was one of suspense. He turned again, a bit carelessly, as if his proposition were a matter of but little significance to him. St. Pierre was not looking at him. He was staring toward the door, as if through it he could see the powerful form of Bateese bending over the stern sweep. And Carrigan could see that his face was flaming with a great desire, and that the blood in his body was pounding to the mighty urge of it.

Suddenly he faced Carrigan.

"M'sieu, listen to me," he said. "You are a brave man. You are a man of honor, and I know you will bury sacredly in your heart what I am going to tell you now, and never let a word of it escape—even to my Jeanne. I do not blame you for loving her. *Non!*

You could not help that. You have fought well to keep it within yourself, and for that I honor you. How do I know? *Mon Dieu,* she has told me! A woman's heart understands, and a woman's ears are quick to hear, m'sieu. When you were sick, and your mind was wandering, you told her again and again that you loved her—and when she brought you back to life, her eyes saw more than once the truth of what your lips had betrayed, though you tried to keep it to yourself. Even more, m'sieu—she felt the touch of your lips on her hair that day. She understands. She has told me everything, openly, innocently—yet her heart thrills with that sympathy of a woman who knows she is loved. M'sieu, if you could have seen the light in her eyes and the glow in her cheeks as she told me these secrets. But I am not jealous! *Non!* It is only because you are a brave man, and one of honor, that I tell you all this. She would die of shame did she know I had betrayed her confidence. Yet it is necessary that I tell you, because if we make the big wager we must drop my Jeanne from the gamble. Do you comprehend me, m'sieu?

"We are two men, strong men, fighting men. I—Pierre Boulain—can not feel the shame of jealousy where a woman's heart is pure and sweet, and where a man has fought against love with honor as you have fought. And you, m'sieu—David Carrigan, of the Police—can not strike with your hard man's hand that tender heart, that is like a flower, and which this mo-

ment is beating faster than it should with the fear that some harm is going to befall you. Is it not so, m'sieu? We will make the wager, yes. But if you whip Bateese—and you can not do that in a hundred years of fighting—I will not tell you why my Jeanne shot at you behind the rock. *Non,* never! Yet I swear I will tell you the other. If you win, I will tell you all I know about Roger Audemard, and that is considerable, m'sieu. Do you agree?"

Slowly David held out a hand. St. Pierre's gripped it. The fingers of the two men met like bands of steel.

"Tomorrow you will fight," said St. Pierre. "You will fight and be beaten so terribly that you may always show the marks of it. I am sorry. Such a man as you I would rather have as a brother than an enemy. And she will never forgive me. She will always remember it. The thought will never die out of her heart that I was a beast to let you fight Bateese. But it is best for all. And my men? Ah! *Diable,* but it will be great sport for them, m'sieu!"

His hand unclasped. He turned to the door. A moment later it closed behind him, and David was alone. He had not spoken. He had not replied to the engulfing truths that had fallen quietly and without a betrayal of passion from St. Pierre's lips. Inwardly he was crushed. Yet his face was like stone, hiding his shame. And then, suddenly, there came a sound from outside that sent the blood through his cold veins again. It was laughter, the great, booming laughter

of St. Pierre! It was not the merriment of a man whose heart was bleeding, or into whose life had come an unexpected pain or grief. It was wild and free, and filled with the joy of the sun-filled day.

And David, listening to it, felt something that was more than admiration for this man growing within him. And unconsciously his lips repeated St. Pierre's words.

"Tomorrow—you will fight."

XVII

FOR many minutes David stood at the bateau window and watched the canoe that carried St. Pierre Boulain and the Broken Man back to the raft. It moved slowly, as if St. Pierre was loitering with a purpose and was thinking deeply of what had passed. Carrigan's fingers tightened, and his face grew tense, as he gazed out into the glow of the western sun. Now that the stress of nerve-breaking moments in the cabin was over, he no longer made an effort to preserve the veneer of coolness and decision with which he had encountered the chief of the Boulains. Deep in his soul he was crushed and humiliated. Every nerve in his body was bleeding.

He had heard St. Pierre's big laugh a moment before, but it must have been the laugh of a man who was stabbed to the heart. And he was going back to Marie-Anne like that—drifting scarcely faster than the current that he might steal time to strengthen himself before he looked into her eyes again. David could see him, motionless, his giant shoulders hunched forward a little, his head bowed, and in the stern the Broken Man paddled listlessly, his eyes on the face of his master. Without voice David cursed himself. In his

egoism he had told himself that he had made a splendid fight in resisting the temptation of a great love for the wife of St. Pierre. But what was his own struggle compared with this tragedy which St. Pierre was now facing?

He turned from the window and looked about the cabin room again—the woman's room and St. Pierre's—and his face burned in its silent accusation. Like a living thing it painted another picture for him. For a space he lost his own identity. He saw himself in the place of St. Pierre. He was the husband of Marie-Anne, worshipping her even as St. Pierre must worship her, and he came, as St. Pierre had come, to find a stranger in his home, a stranger who had lain in his bed, a stranger whom his wife had nursed back to life, a stranger who had fallen in love with his most inviolable possession, who had told her of his love, who had kissed her, who had held her close in his arms, whose presence had brought a warmer flush and a brighter glow into eyes and cheeks that until this stranger's coming had belonged only to him. And he heard her, as St. Pierre had heard her, pleading with him to keep this man from harm; he heard her soft voice, telling of the things that had passed between them, and he saw in her eyes——

With almost a cry he swept the thought and the picture from him. It was an atrocious thing to conceive, impossible of reality. And yet the truth would not go. What would he have done in St. Pierre's place?

He went to the window again. Yes, St. Pierre was a bigger man than he. For St. Pierre had come quietly and calmly, offering a hand of friendship, generous, smiling, keeping his hurt to himself, while he, Dave Carrigan, would have come with the murder of man in his heart.

His eyes passed from the canoe to the raft, and from the big raft to the hazy billows of green and golden forest that melted off into interminable miles of distance beyond the river. He knew that on the other side of him lay that same distance, north, east, south, and west, vast spaces in an unpeopled world, the same green and golden forests, ten thousand plains and rivers and lakes, a million hiding-places where romance and tragedy might remain forever undisturbed. The thought came to him that it would not be difficult to slip out into that world and disappear. He almost owed it to St. Pierre. It was the voice of Bateese in a snatch of wild and discordant song that brought him back into grim reality. There was, after all, that embarrassing matter of justice—and the accursed Law!

After a little he observed that the canoe was moving faster, and that André's paddle was working steadily and with force. St. Pierre no longer sat hunched in the bow. His head was erect, and he was waving a hand in the direction of the raft. A figure had come from the cabin on the huge mass of floating timber. David caught the shimmer of a woman's dress, something white fluttering over her head, waving back at St.

Pierre. It was Marie-Anne, and he moved away from the window.

He wondered what was passing between St. Pierre and his wife in the hour that followed. The bateau kept abreast of the raft, moving neither faster nor slower than it did, and twice he surrendered to the desire to scan the deck of the floating timbers through his binoculars. But the cabin held St. Pierre and Marie-Anne, and he saw neither of them again until the sun was setting. Then St. Pierre came out—alone.

Even at that distance over the broad river he heard the booming voice of the chief of the Boulains. Life sprang up where there had been the drowse of inactivity aboard the raft. A dozen more of the great sweeps were swiftly manned by men who appeared suddenly from the shaded places of canvas shelters and striped tents. A murmur of voices rose over the water, and then the murmur was broken by howls and shouts as the rivermen ran to their places at the command of St. Pierre's voice, and as the sweeps began to flash in the setting sun, it gave way entirely to the evening chant of the Paddling Song.

David gripped himself as he listened and watched the slowly drifting glory of the world that came down to the shores of the river. He could see St. Pierre clearly, for the bateau had worked its way nearer. He could see the bare heads and naked arms of the rivermen at the sweeps. The sweet breath of the forests filled his lungs, as that picture lay before him, and there

came into his soul a covetousness and a yearning where before there had been humiliation and the grim urge of duty. He could breathe the air of that world, he could look at its beauty, he could worship it—and yet he knew that he was not a part of it as those others were a part of it. He envied the men at the sweeps; he felt his heart swelling at the exultation and joy in their song. They were going home—home down the big rivers, home to the heart of God's Country, where wives and sweethearts and happiness were waiting for them, and their visions were his visions as he stared wide-eyed and motionless over the river. And yet he was irrevocably an alien. He was more than that—an enemy, a man-hound sent out on a trail to destroy, an agent of a powerful and merciless force that carried with it punishment and death.

The crew of the bateau had joined in the evening song of the rivermen on the raft, and over the ridges and hollows of the forest tops, red and green and gold in the last warm glory of the sun, echoed that chanting voice of men. David understood now what St. Pierre's command had been. The huge raft with its tented city of life was preparing to tie up for the night. A quarter of a mile ahead the river widened, so that on the far side was a low, clean shore toward which the efforts of the men at the sweeps were slowly edging the raft. York boats shot out on the shore side and dropped anchors that helped drag the big craft in. Two others tugged at tow-lines fastened to the shore-

side bow, and within twenty minutes the first men were plunging up out of the water on the white strip of beach and were whipping the tie-lines about the nearest treets. David unconsciously was smiling in the thrill and triumph of these last moments, and not until they were over did he sense the fact that Bateese and his crew were bringing the bateau in to the opposite shore. Before the sun was quite down, both raft and houseboat were anchored for the night.

As the shadows of the distant forests deepened, Carrigan felt impending about him an oppression of emptiness and loneliness which he had not experienced before. He was disappointed that the bateau had not tied up with the raft. Already he could see men building fires. Spirals of smoke began to rise from the shore, and he knew that the riverman's happiest of all hours, supper time, was close at hand. He looked at his watch. It was after seven o'clock. Then he watched the fading away of the sun until only the red glow of it remained in the west, and against the still thicker shadows the fires of the rivermen threw up yellow flames. On his own side, Bateese and the bateau crew were preparing their meal. It was eight o'clock when a man he had not seen before brought in his supper. He ate, scarcely sensing the taste of his food, and half an hour later the man reappeared for the dishes.

It was not quite dark when he returned to his window, but the far shore was only an indistinct blur of

gloom. The fires were brighter. One of them, built solely because of the rivermen's inherent love of light and cheer, threw the blaze of its flaming logs twenty feet into the air.

He wondered what Marie-Anne was doing in this hour. Last night they had been together. He had marveled at the witchery of the moonlight in her hair and eyes, he had told her of the beauty of it, she had smiled, she had laughed softly with him—for hours they had sat in the spell of the golden night and the glory of the river. And tonight—now—was she with St. Pierre, waiting as they had waited last night for the rising of the moon? Had she forgotten? *Could* she forget? Or was she, as he thought St. Pierre had painfully tried to make him believe, innocent of all the thoughts and desires that had come to him, as he sat worshipping her in their stolen hours? He could think of them only as stolen, for he did not believe Marie-Anne had revealed to her husband all she might have told him.

He was sure he would never see her again as he had seen her then, and something of bitterness rose in him as he thought of that. St. Pierre, could he have seen her face and eyes when he told her that her hair in the moonlight was lovelier than anything he had ever seen, would have throttled him with his naked hands in that meeting in the cabin. For St. Pierre's code would not have had her eyes droop under their long lashes or her cheeks flush so warmly at the words of another

man—and he could not take vengeance on the woman herself. No, she had not told St. Pierre all she might have told! There were things which she must have kept to herself, which she dared not reveal even to this great-hearted man who was her husband. Shame, if nothing more, had kept her silent.

Did she feel that shame as he was feeling it? It was inconceivable to think otherwise. And for that reason, more than all others, he knew that she would not meet him face to face again—unless he forced that meeting. And there was little chance of that, for his pledge with St. Pierre had eliminated her from the aftermath of tomorrow's drama, his fight with Bateese. Only when St. Pierre might stand in a court of law would there be a possibility of her eyes meeting his own again, and then they would flame with the hatred that at another time had been in the eyes of Carmin Fanchet.

With the dull stab of a thing that of late had been growing inside him, he wondered what had happened to Carmin Fanchet in the years that had gone since he had brought about the hanging of her brother. Last night and the night before, strange dreams of her had come to him in restless slumber. It was disturbing to him that he should wake up in the middle of the night dreaming of her, when he had gone to his bed with a mind filled to overflowing with the sweet presence of Marie-Anne Boulain. And now his mind reached out poignantly into mysterious darkness and

doubt, even as the darkness of night spread itself in a thickening canopy over the river.

Gray clouds had followed the sun of a faultless day, and the stars were veiled overhead. When David turned from the window, it was so dark in the cabin that he could not see. He did not light the lamps, but made his way to St. Pierre's couch and sat down in the silence and gloom.

Through the open windows came to him the cadence of the river and the forests. There was silence of human voice ashore, but under him he heard the lapping murmur of water as it rustled under the stern and side of the bateau, and from the deep timber came the never-ceasing whisper of the spruce and cedar tops, and the subdued voice of creatures whose hours of activity had come with the dying out of the sun.

For a long time he sat in this darkness. And then there came to him a sound that was different than the other sounds—a low monotone of voices, the dipping of a paddle—and a canoe passed close under his windows and up the shore. He paid small attention to it until, a little later, the canoe returned, and its occupants boarded the bateau. It would have roused little interest in him then had he not heard a voice that was thrillingly like the voice of a woman.

He drew his hunched shoulders erect and stared through the darkness toward the door. A moment more and there was no doubt. It was almost shock that sent the blood leaping suddenly through his veins.

The inconceivable had happened. It was Marie-Anne out there, talking in a low voice to Bateese!

Then there came a heavy knock at his door, and he heard the door open. Through it he saw the grayer gloom of the outside night partly shut out a heavy shadow.

"M'sieu!" called the voice of Bateese.

"I am here," said David.

"You have not gone to bed, m'sieu?"

"No."

The heavy shadow seemed to fade away, and yet there still remained a shadow there. David's heart thumped as he noted the slenderness of it. For a space there was silence. And then,

"Will you light the lamps, M'sieu David?" a soft voice came to him. "I want to come in, and I am afraid of this terrible darkness!"

He rose to his feet, fumbling in his pocket for matches.

XVIII

HE did not turn toward Marie-Anne when he had lighted the first of the great brass lamps hanging at the side of the bateau. He went to the second, and struck another match, and flooded the cabin with light.

She still stood silhouetted against the darkness beyond the cabin door when he faced her. She was watching him, her eyes intent, her face a little pale, he thought. Then he smiled and nodded. He could not see a great change in her since this afternoon, except that there seemed to be a little more fire in the glow of her eyes. They were looking at him steadily as she smiled and nodded, wide, beautiful eyes in which there was surely no revelation of shame or regret, and no very clear evidence of unhappiness. David stared, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth.

"Why is it that you sit in darkness?" she asked, stepping within and closing the door. "Did you not expect me to return and apologize for leaving you so suddenly this afternoon? It was impolite. Afterward I was ashamed. But I was excited, M'sieu David. I——"

"Of course," he hurried to interrupt her. "I understand. St. Pierre is a lucky man. I congratulate you

—as well as him. He is splendid, a man in whom you can place great faith and confidence."

"He scolded me for running away from you as I did, M'sieu David. He said I should have shown better courtesy than to leave like that one who was a guest in our—home. So I have returned, like a good child, to make amends."

"It was not necessary."

"But you were lonesome and in darkness!"

He nodded. "Yes."

"And besides," she added, so quietly and calmly that he was amazed, "you know my sleeping apartment is also on the bateau. And St. Pierre made me promise to say good night to you."

"It is an imposition," cried David, the blood rushing to his face. "You have given up all this to me! Why not let me go into that little room forward, or sleep on the raft and you and St. Pierre——"

"St. Pierre would not leave the raft," replied Marie-Anne, turning from him toward the table on which were the books and magazines and her work-basket. "And I like my little room forward."

"St. Pierre——"

He stopped himself. He could see a sudden color deepening in the cheek of St. Pierre's wife as she made pretense of looking for something in her basket. He felt that if he went on he would blunder, if he had not already blundered. He was uncomfortable, for he believed he had guessed the truth. It was not quite a-

sonable to expect that Marie-Anne would come to him like this on the first night of St. Pierre's homecoming. Something had happened over in the little cabin on the raft, he told himself. Perhaps there had been a quarrel—at least ironical implications on St. Pierre's part. And his sympathy was with St. Pierre.

He caught suddenly a little tremble at the corner of Marie-Anne's mouth as her face was turned partly from him, and he stepped to the opposite side of the table so he could look at her fairly. If there had been unpleasantness in the cabin on the raft, St. Pierre's wife in no way gave evidence of it. The color had deepened to almost a blush in her cheeks, but it was not on account of embarrassment, for one who is embarrassed is not usually amused, and as she looked up at him her eyes were filled with the flash of laughter which he had caught her lips struggling to restrain. Then, finding a bit of lace work with the needles meshed in it, she seated herself, and again he was looking down on the droop of her long lashes and the seductive glow of her lustrous hair. Yesterday, in a moment of irresistible impulse, he had told her how lovely it was as she had dressed it, a bewitching crown of interwoven coils, not drawn tightly, but crumpled and soft, as if the mass of tresses were openly rebelling at closer confinement. She had told him the effect was entirely accidental, largely due to carelessness and haste in dressing it. Accidental or otherwise, it was the same tonight, and in the heart of it were the drooping red petals of a

flower she had gathered with him early that afternoon.

"St. Pierre brought me over," she said in a calmly matter-of-fact voice, as though she had expected David to know that from the beginning. "He is ashore talking over important matters with Bateese. I am sure he will drop in and say good night before he returns to the raft. He asked me to wait for him—here." She raised her eyes, so clear and untroubled, so quietly unembarrassed under his gaze, that he would have staked his life she had no suspicion of the confessions which St. Pierre had revealed to him.

"Do you care? Would you rather put out the lights and go to bed?"

He shook his head. "No. I am glad. I was beastly lonesome. I had an idea——"

He was on the point of blundering again when he caught himself. The effect of her so near him was more than ever disturbing, in spite of St. Pierre. Her eyes, clear and steady, yet soft as velvet when they looked at him, made his tongue and his thoughts dangerously uncertain.

"You had an idea, M'sieu David?"

"That you would have no desire to see me again after my talk with St. Pierre," he said. "Did he tell you about it?"

"He said you were very fine, M'sieu David—and that he liked you."

"And he told you it is determined that I shall fight Bateese in the morning?"

"Yes."

The one word was spoken with a quiet lack of excitement, even of interest—it seemed to belie some of the things St. Pierre had told him, and he could scarcely believe, looking at her now, that she had entreated her husband to prevent the encounter, or that she had betrayed any unusual emotion in the matter at all.

"I was afraid you would object," he could not keep from saying. "It does not seem nice to pull off such a thing as that, when there is a lady about——"

"Or *ladies.*" She caught him up quickly, and he saw a sudden little tightening of her pretty mouth as she turned her eyes to the bit of lace work again. "But I do not object, because what St. Pierre says is right —must be right."

And the softness, he thought, went altogether out of the curve of her lips for an instant. In a flash their momentary betrayal of vexation was gone, and St. Pierre's wife had replaced the work-basket on the table and was on her feet, smiling at him. There was something of wild daring in her eyes, something that made him think of the glory of adventure he had seen flaming in her face the night they had run the rapids of the Holy Ghost.

"Tomorrow will be very unpleasant, M'sieu David," she cried softly. "Bateese will beat you—terribly. Tonight we must think of things more agreeable."

He had never seen her more radiant than when she

turned toward the piano. What the deuce did it mean? Had St. Pierre been making a fool of him? She actually appeared unable to restrain her elation at the thought that Bateese would surely beat him up! He stood without moving and made no effort to answer her. Just before they had started on that thrilling adventure into the forest, which had ended with his carrying her in his arms, she had gone to the piano and had played for him. Now her fingers touched softly the same notes. A little humming trill came in her throat, and it seemed to David that she was deliberately recalling his thoughts to the things that had happened before the coming of St. Pierre. He had not lighted the lamp over the piano, and for a flash her dark eyes smiled at him out of the half shadow. After a moment she began to sing.

Her voice was low and without effort, untrained, and subdued as if conscious and afraid of its limitations, yet so exquisitely sweet that to David it was a new and still more wonderful revelation of St. Pierre's wife. He drew nearer, until he stood close at her side, the dark luster of her hair almost touching his arm, her partly upturned face a bewitching profile in the shadows.

Her voice grew lower, almost a whisper in its melody, as if meant for him alone. Many times he had heard the Canadian Boat Song, but never as its words came now from the lips of Marie-Anne Boulain.

"Faintly as tolls the evening chime,
Our voices keep tune, and our oars keep time.
Soon as the woods on shore look dim,
We'll sing at St. Ann's our parting hymn;
Row, brothers, row, the stream runs fast,
The rapids are near, and the daylight's past."

She paused. And David, staring down at her shining head, did not speak. Her fingers trembled over the keys, he could see dimly the shadow of her long lashes, and the spirit-like scent of crushed violets rose to him from the soft lace about her throat and her hair.

"It is your music," he whispered. "I have never heard the Boat Song like that!"

He tried to drag his eyes from her face and hair, sensing that he was a near-criminal, fighting a mighty impulse. The notes under her fingers changed, and again—by chance or design—she was stabbing at him, bringing him face to face with the weakness of his flesh, the iniquity of his desire to reach out his arms and crumple her in them. Yet she did not look up, she did not see him, as she began to sing "Ave Maria."

"Ave, Maria, hear my cry!
O, guide my path where no harm, no harm is nigh——"

As she went on, he knew she had forgotten to think of him. With the reverence of a prayer the holy words came from her lips, slowly, softly, trembling with a pathos and sweetness that told David they came not

alone from the lips, but from the very soul of St. Pierre's wife.

And then——

"Oh, Mother, hear me where thou art,
And guard and guide my aching heart, my aching heart!"

The last words drifted away into a whisper, and David was glad that he was not looking into the face of St. Pierre's wife, for there must have been something there now which it would have been sacrilege for him to stare at, as he was staring at her hair.

No sound of opening door had come from behind them. Yet St. Pierre had opened it and stood there, watching them with a curious humor in eyes that seemed still to hold a glitter of the fire that had leaped from the half-breed's flaming birch logs. His voice was a shock to Carrigan.

"*Peste,* but you are a gloomy pair!" he boomed. "Why no light over there in the corner, and why sing that death-song to chase away the devil when there is no devil near?"

Guilt was in David's heart, but there was no sting of venom in St. Pierre's words, and he was laughing at them now, as though what he saw were a pretty joke and amused him.

"Late hours and shady bowers! I say it should be a love song or something livelier," he cried, closing the door behind him and coming toward them. "Why not

En Roulant ma Boule, my sweet Jeanne? You know that is my favorite."

He suddenly interrupted himself, and his voice rolled out in a wild chant that rocked the cabin.

"The wind is fresh, the wind is free,
En roulant ma boule!
The wind is fresh—my love waits me,
Rouli, roulant, ma boule roulant!
Behind our house a spring you see,
In it three ducks swim merrily,
And hunting, the Prince's son went he,
With a silver gun right fair to see——"

David was conscious that St. Pierre's wife had risen to her feet, and now she came out of shadow into light, and he was amazed to see that she was laughing back at St. Pierre, and that her two fore-fingers were thrust in her ears to keep out the bellow of her husband's voice. She was not at all discomfited by his unexpected appearance, but rather seemed to join in the humor of the thing with St. Pierre, though he fancied he could see something in her face that was forced and uneasy. He believed that under the surface of her composure she was suffering a distress which she did not reveal.

St. Pierre advanced and carelessly patted her shoulder with one of his big hands, while he spoke to David.

"Has she not the sweetest voice in the world, m'sieu? Did you ever hear a sweeter or as sweet? I

say it is enough to get down into the soul of a man, unless he is already half dead! That voice——"

He caught Marie-Anne's eyes. Her cheeks were flaming. Her look, for an instant, flashed lightning as she halted him.

"*Ma foi,* I speak it from the heart," he persisted, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Am I not right, M'sieu Carrigan? Did you ever hear a sweeter voice?"

"It is wonderful," agreed David, wondering if he was hazarding too much.

"Good! It fills me with happiness to know I am right. And now, *cherie,* good-night! I must return to the raft."

A shadow of vexation crossed Marie-Anne's face. "You seem in great haste."

"Plagues and pests! You are right, Pretty Voice! I am most anxious to get back to my troubles there, and you——"

"Will also bid M'sieu Carrigan good-night," she quickly interrupted him. "You will at least see me to my room, St. Pierre, and safely put away for the night."

She held out her hand to David. There was not a tremor in it as it lay for an instant soft and warm in his own. She made no effort to withdraw it quickly, nor did her eyes hide their softness as they looked into his own.

Mutely David stood as they went out. He heard St. Pierre's loud voice rumbling about the darkness

of the night. He heard them pass along the side of the bateau forward, and half a minute later he knew that St. Pierre was getting into his canoe. The dip of a paddle came to him.

For a space there was silence, and then, from far out in the black shadow of the river, rolled back the great voice of St. Pierre Boulain singing the wild river chant, *"En Roulant ma Boule."*

At the open window he listened. It seemed to him that from far over the river, where the giant raft lay, there came a faint answer to the words of the song.

XIX

WITH the slow approach of the storm which was advancing over the wilderness, Carrigan felt more poignantly the growing unrest that was in him. He heard the last of St. Pierre's voice, and after that the fires on the distant shore died out slowly, giving way to utter blackness. Faintly there came to him the far-away rumbling of thunder. The air grew heavy and thick, and there was no sound of night-bird over the breast of the river, and out of the thick cedar and spruce and balsam there came no cry or whisper of the nocturnal life waiting in silence for the storm to break. In that stillness David put out the lights in the cabin and sat close to the window in darkness.

He was more than sleepless. Every nerve in his body demanded action, and his brain was fired by strange thoughts until their vividness seemed to bring him face to face with a reality that set his blood stirring with an irresistible thrill. He believed he had made a discovery, that St. Pierre had betrayed himself. What he had visioned, the conclusion he had arrived at, seemed inconceivable, yet what his own eyes had seen and his ears had heard pointed to the truth of it all. The least he could say was that St.

Pierre's love for Marie-Anne Boulain was a strange sort of love. His attitude toward her seemed more like that of a man in the presence of a child of whom he was fond in a fatherly sort of way. His affection, as he had expressed it, was parental and careless. Not for an instant had there been in it a betrayal of the lover, no suggestion of the husband who cared deeply or who might be made jealous by another man.

Sitting in darkness thickening with the nearer approach of storm, David recalled the stab of pain mingled with humiliation that had come into the eyes of St. Pierre's wife when she had stood facing her husband. He heard again, with a new understanding, the low note of pathos in her voice as in song she had called upon the Mother of Christ to hear her—and help her. He had not guessed at the tragedy of it then. Now he knew, and he thought of her lying awake in the gloom beyond the bulkhead, her eyes wet with tears. And St. Pierre had gone back to his raft, singing in the night! Where before there had been sympathy for him, there rose a sincere revulsion. There had been a reason for St. Pierre's masterly possession of himself, and it had not been, as he had thought, because of his bigness of soul. It was because he had not cared. He was a splendid hypocrite, playing his game well at the beginning, but betraying the lie at the end. He did not love Marie-Anne as he, Dave Carrigan, loved her. He had spoken of her as a child, and he had treated her as a child, and was

serenely dispassionate in the face of a situation which would have roused the spirit in most men. And suddenly, recalling that thrilling hour in the white strip of sand and all that had happened since, it flashed upon David that St. Pierre was using his wife as the vital moving force in a game of his own—that under the masquerade of his apparent faith and bigness of character he was sacrificing her to achieve a certain mysterious something in the scheme of his own affairs.

Yet he could not forget the infinite faith Marie-Anne Boulain had expressed in her husband. There had been no hypocrisy in her waiting and her watching for him, or in her belief that he would straighten out the tangles of the dilemma in which she had become involved. Nor had there been make-believe in the manner she had left him that day in her eagerness to go to St. Pierre. Adding these facts as he had added the others, he fancied he saw the truth staring at him out of the darkness of his cabin room. Marie-Anne loved her husband. And St. Pierre was merely the possessor, careless and indifferent, almost brutally dispassionate in his consideration of her.

A heavy crash of thunder brought Carrigan back to a realization of the impending storm. He rose to his feet in the chaotic gloom, facing the bulkhead beyond which he was certain St. Pierre's wife lay wide awake. He tried to laugh. It was inexcusable, he told himself, to let his thoughts become involved in the family affairs of St. Pierre and Marie-Anne. That

was not his business. Marie-Anne, in the final analysis, did not appear to be especially abused, and her mind was not a child's mind. Probably she would not thank him for his interest in the matter. She would tell him, like any other woman with pride, that it was none of his business and that he was presuming upon forbidden ground.

He went to the window. There was scarcely a breath of air, and unfastening the screen, he thrust out his head and shoulders into the night. It was so black that he could not see the shadow of the water almost within reach of his hands, but through the chaos of gloom that lay between him and the opposite shore he made out a single point of yellow light. He was positive the light was in the cabin on the raft. And St. Pierre was probably in that cabin.

A huge drop of rain splashed on his hand, and behind him he heard sweeping over the forest tops the quickening march of the deluge. There was no crash of thunder or flash of lightning when it broke. Straight down, in an inundation, it came out of a sky thick enough to slit with a knife. Carrigan drew in his head and shoulders and sniffed the sweet freshness of it. He tried again to make out the light on the raft, but it was obliterated.

Mechanically he began taking off his clothes, and in a few moments he stood again at the window, naked. Thunder and lightning had caught up with the rain.

and in the flashes of fire Carrigan's ghost-white face stared in the direction of the raft. In his veins was at work an insistent and impelling desire. Over there was St. Pierre, he was undoubtedly in the cabin, and something might happen if he, Dave Carrigan, took advantage of storm and gloom to go to the raft.

It was almost a presentiment that drew his bare head and shoulders out through the window, and every hunting instinct in him urged him to the adventure. The stygian darkness was torn again by a flash of fire. In it he saw the river and the vivid silhouette of the distant shore. It would not be a difficult swim, and it would be good training for tomorrow.

Like a badger worming his way out of a hole a bit too small for him, Carrigan drew himself through the window. A lightning flash caught him at the edge of the bateau, and he slunk back quickly against the cabin, with the thought that other eyes might be staring out into that same darkness. In the pitch gloom that followed he lowered himself quietly into the river, thrust himself under water, and struck out for the opposite shore.

When he came to the surface again it was in the glare of another lightning flash. He flung the water from his face, chose a point several hundred yards above the raft, and with quick, powerful strokes set out in its direction. For ten minutes he quartered the current without raising his head. Then he paused, floating unresistingly with the slow sweep of the river,

and waited for another illumination. When it came, he made out the tented raft scarcely a hundred yards away and a little below him. In the next darkness he found the edge of it and dragged himself up on the mass of timbers.

The thunder had been rolling steadily westward, and David crouched low, hoping for one more flash to illumine the raft. It came at last from a mass of inky cloud far to the west, so indistinct that it made only dim shadows out of the tents and shelters, but it was sufficient to give him direction. Before its faint glare died out, he saw the deeper shadow of the cabin forward.

For many minutes he lay where he had dragged himself, without making a movement in its direction. Nowhere about him could he see a sign of light, nor could he hear any sound of life. St. Pierre's people were evidently deep in slumber.

Carrigan had no very definite idea of the next step in his adventure. He had swum from the bateau largely under impulse, with no preconceived scheme of action, urged chiefly by the hope that he would find St. Pierre in the cabin and that something might come of it. As for knocking at the door and rousing the chief of the Boulains from sleep—he had at the present moment no very good excuse for that. No sooner had the thought and its objection come to him than a broad shaft of light shot with startling suddenness athwart the blackness of the raft, darkened in another instant

by an obscuring shadow. Swift as the light itself David's eyes turned to the source of the unexpected illumination. The door of St. Pierre's cabin was wide open. The interior was flooded with lampglow, and in the doorway stood St. Pierre himself.

The chief of the Boulains seemed to be measuring the weather possibilities of the night. His subdued voice reached David, chuckling with satisfaction, as he spoke to some one who was behind him in the cabin.

"Pitch and brimstone, but it's black!" he cried. "You could carve it with a knife, and stand it on end, *amante*. But it's going west. In a few hours the stars will be out."

He drew back into the cabin, and the door closed. David held his breath in amazement, staring at the blackness where a moment before the light had been. Who was it St. Pierre had called sweetheart? *Amante!* He could not have been mistaken. The word had come to him clearly, and there was but one guess to make. Marie-Anne was not on the bateau. She had played him for a fool, had completely hoodwinked him in her plot with St. Pierre. They were cleverer than he had supposed, and in darkness she had rejoined her husband on the raft! But why that senseless play of falsehood? What could be their object in wanting him to believe she was still aboard the bateau?

He stood up on his feet and mopped the warm rain from his face, while the gloom hid the grim smile that came slowly to his lips. Close upon the thrill of his

astonishment he felt a new stir in his blood which added impetus to his determination and his action. He was not disgusted with himself, nor was he embittered by what he had thought of a moment ago as the lying hypocrisy of his captors. To be beaten in his game of man-hunting was sometimes to be expected, and Carrigan always gave proper credit to the winners. It was also "good medicine" to know that Marie-Anne, instead of being an unhappy and neglected wife, had blinded him with an exquisitely clever simulation. Just why she had done it, and why St. Pierre had played his masquerade, it was his duty now to find out.

An hour ago he would have cut off a hand before spying upon St. Pierre's wife or eavesdropping under her window. Now he felt no uneasiness of conscience as he approached the cabin, for Marie-Anne herself had destroyed all reason for any delicate discrimination on his part.

The rain had almost stopped, and in one of the near tents he heard a sleepy voice. But he had no fear of chance discovery. The night would remain dark for a long time, and in his bare feet he made no sound the sharpest ears of a dog ten feet away might have heard. Close to the cabin door, yet in such a way that the sudden opening of it would not reveal him, he paused and listened.

Distinctly he heard St. Pierre's voice, but not the words. A moment later came the soft, joyous laughter of a woman, and for an instant a hand seemed to

grip David's heart, filling it with pain. There was no unhappiness in that laughter. It seemed, instead, to tremble in an exultation of gladness.

Suddenly St. Pierre came nearer the door, and his voice was more distinct. "*Chere-cœur,* I tell you it is the greatest joke of my life," he heard him say. "We are safe. If it should come to the worst, we can settle the matter in another way. I can not but sing and laugh, even in the face of it all. And she, in that very innocence which amuses me so, has no suspicion——"

He turned, and vainly David keyed his ears to catch the final words. The voices in the cabin grew lower. Twice he heard the soft laughter of the woman. St. Pierre's voice, when he spoke, was unintelligible.

The thought that his random adventure was bringing him to an important discovery possessed Carrigan. St. Pierre, he believed, had been on the very edge of disclosing something which he would have given a great deal to know. Surely in this cabin there must be a window, and the window would be open——

Quietly he felt his way through the darkness to the shore side of the cabin. A narrow bar of light at least partly confirmed his judgment. There was a window. But it was almost entirely curtained, and it was closed. Had the curtain been drawn two inches lower, the thin stream of light would have been shut entirely out from the night.

Under this window David crouched for several

minutes, hoping that in the calm which was succeeding the storm it might be opened. The voices were still more indistinct inside. He scarcely heard St. Pierre, but twice again he heard the low and musical laughter of the woman. She had laughed differently with *him*—and the grim smile settled on his lips as he looked up at the narrow slit of light over his head. He had an overwhelming desire to look in. After all, it was a matter of professional business—and his duty.

He was glad the curtain was drawn so low. From experiments of his own he knew there was small chance of those inside seeing him through the two-inch slit, and he raised himself boldly until his eyes were on a level with the aperture.

Directly in the line of his vision was St. Pierre's wife. She was seated, and her back was toward him, so he could not see her face. She was partly disrobed, and her hair was streaming loose about her. Once, he remembered, she had spoken of fiery lights that came into her hair under certain illumination. He had seen them in the sun, but never as they revealed themselves now in that cabin lamp glow. He scarcely looked at St. Pierre, who was on his feet, looking down upon her—not until St. Pierre reached out and crumpled the smothering mass of glowing tresses in his big hands, and laughed. It was a laugh filled with the unutterable joy of possession. The woman rose to her feet. Up through her hair went her two white, bare arms, encircling St. Pierre's neck. The giant drew

her close. Her slim form seemed to melt in his, and their lips met.

And then the woman threw back her head, laughing, so that her glory of hair fell straight down, and she was out of reach of St. Pierre's lips. They turned. Her face fronted the window, and out in the night Carrigan stifled a cry that almost broke from his lips. For a flash he was looking straight into her eyes. Her parted lips seemed smiling at him; her white throat and bosom were bared to him. He dropped down, his heart choking him as he stumbled through the darkness to the edge of the raft. There, with the lap of the water at his feet, he paused. It was hard for him to get breath. He stared through the gloom in the direction of the bateau. Marie-Anne Boulain, the woman he loved, was there! In her little cabin, alone, on the bateau, was St. Pierre's wife, her heart crushed.

And in this cabin on the raft, forgetful of her degradation and her grief, was the vilest wretch he had ever known—St. Pierre Boulain. And with him, giving herself into his arms, caressing him with her lips and hair, was the sister of the man he had helped to hang—*Carmin Fanchet!*

XX

THE shock of the amazing discovery which Carrigan had made was as complete as it was unexpected. His eyes had looked upon the last thing in the world he might have guessed at or anticipated when they beheld through the window of St. Pierre's cabin the beautiful face and partly disrobed figure of Carmin Fanchet. The first effect of that shock had been to drive him away. His action had been involuntary, almost without the benefit of reason, as if Carmin had been Marie-Anne herself receiving the caresses which were rightfully hers, and upon which it was both insult and dishonor for him to spy. He realized now that he had made a mistake in leaving the window too quickly.

But he did not move back through the gloom, for there was something too revolting in what he had seen, and with the revulsion of it a swift understanding of the truth which made his hands clench as he sat down on the edge of the raft with his feet and legs submerged in the slow-moving current of the river. The thing was not uncommon. It was the same monstrous story, as old as the river itself, but in this instance it filled him with a sickening sort of horror

which gripped him at first even more than the strangeness of the fact that Carmin Fanchet was the other woman. His vision and his soul were reaching out to the bateau lying in darkness on the far side of the river, where St. Pierre's wife was alone in her unhappiness. His first impulse was to fling himself in the river and race to her—his second, to go back to St. Pierre, even in his nakedness, and call him forth to a reckoning. In his profession of man-hunting he had never had the misfortune to kill, but he could kill St. Pierre—now. His fingers dug into the slippery wood of the log under him, his blood ran hot, and in his eyes blazed the fury of an animal as he stared into the wall of gloom between him and Marie-Anne Boulain.

How much did she know? That was the first question which pounded in his brain. He suddenly recalled his reference to the fight, his apology to Marie-Anne that it should happen so near to her presence, and he saw again the queer little twist of her mouth as she let slip the hint that she was not the only one of her sex who would know of tomorrow's fight. He had not noticed the significance of it then. But now it struck home. Marie-Anne was surely aware of Carmin Fanchet's presence on the raft.

But did she know more than that? Did she know the truth, or was her heart filled only with suspicion and fear, aggravated by St. Pierre's neglect and his too-apparent haste to return to the raft that night?

Again David's mind flashed back, recalling her defense of Carmin Fanchet when he had first told her his story of the woman whose brother he had brought to the hangman's justice. There could be but one conclusion. Marie-Anne knew Carmin Fanchet, and she also knew she was on the raft with St. Pierre.

As cooler judgment returned to him, Carrigan refused to concede more than that. For any one of a dozen reasons Carmin Fanchet might be on the raft going down the river, and it was also quite within reason that Marie-Anne might have some apprehension of a woman as beautiful as Carmin, and possibly intuition had begun to impinge upon her a disturbing fear of a something that might happen. But until tonight he was confident she had fought against this suspicion, and had overridden it, even though she knew a woman more beautiful than herself was slowly drifting down the stream with her husband. She had betrayed no anxiety to him in the days that had passed; she had waited eagerly for St. Pierre; like a bird she had gone to him when at last he came, and he had seen her crushed close in St. Pierre's arms in their meeting. It was this night, with its gloom and its storm, that had made the shadowings of her unrest a torturing reality. For St. Pierre had brought her back to the bateau and had played a pitiably weak part in concealing his desire to return to the raft.

So he told himself Marie-Anne did not know the truth, not as he had seen it through the window of

St. Pierre's cabin. She had been hurt, for he had seen the sting of it, and in that same instant he had seen her soul rise up and triumph. He saw again the sudden fire that came into her eyes when St. Pierre urged the necessity of his haste, he saw her slim body grow tense, her red lips curve in a flash of pride and disdain. And as Carrigan thought of her in that way his muscles grew tighter, and he cursed St. Pierre. Marie-Anne might be hurt, she might guess that her husband's eyes and thoughts were too frequently upon another's face—but in the glory of her womanhood it was impossible for her to conceive of a crime such as he had witnessed through the cabin window. Of that he was sure.

And then, suddenly, like a blinding sheet of lightning out of a dark sky, came back to him all that St. Pierre had said about Marie-Anne. He had pitied St. Pierre then; he had pitied this great cool-eyed giant of a man who was fighting gloriously, he had thought, in the face of a situation that would have excited most men. Frankly St. Pierre had told him Marie-Anne cared more for him than she should. With equal frankness he had revealed his wife's confessions to him, that she knew of his love for her, of his kiss upon her hair.

In the blackness Carrigan's face burned hot. If he had in him the desire to kill St. Pierre now, might not St. Pierre have had an equally just desire to kill him? For he had known, even as he kissed her hair, and as his arms held her close to his breast in crossing

the creek, that she was the wife of St. Pierre. And Marie-Anne——

His muscles relaxed. Slowly he lowered himself into the cool wash of the river, and struck out toward the bateau. He did not breast the current with the same fierce determination with which he had crossed through the storm to the raft, but drifted with it and reached the opposite shore a quarter of a mile below the bateau. Here he waited for a time, while the thickness of the clouds broke, and a gray light came through them, revealing dimly the narrow path of pebbly wash along the shore. Silently, a stark naked shadow in the night, he came back to the bateau and crawled through his window.

He lighted a lamp, and turned it very low, and in the dim glow of it rubbed his muscles until they burned. He was fit for tomorrow, and the knowledge of that fitness filled him with a savage elation. A good-humored love of sport had induced him to fling his first half-bantering challenge into the face of Concombre Bateese, but that sentiment was gone. The approaching fight was no longer an incident, a foolish error into which he had unwittingly plunged himself. In this hour it was the biggest physical thing that had ever loomed up in his life, and he yearned for the dawn with the eagerness of a beast that waits for the kill which comes with the break of day. But it was not the half-breed's face he saw under the hammering of his blows. He could not hate the half-breed. He

could not even dislike him now. He forced himself to bed, and later he slept. In the dream that came to him it was not Bateese who faced him in battle, but St. Pierre Boulain.

He awoke with that dream a thing of fire in his brain. The sun was not yet up, but the flush of it was painting the east, and he dressed quietly and carefully, listening for some sound of awakening beyond the bulkhead. If Marie-Anne was awake, she was very still. There was noise ashore. Across the river he could hear the singing of men, and through his window saw the white smoke of early fires rising above the tree-tops. It was the Indian who unlocked the door and brought in his breakfast, and it was the Indian who returned for the dishes half an hour later.

After that Carrigan waited, tense with the desire for action to begin. He sensed no premonition of evil about to befall him. Every nerve and sinew in his body was alive for the combat. He thrilled with an overwhelming confidence, a conviction of his ability to win, an almost dangerous, self-conviction of approaching triumph in spite of the odds in weight and brute strength which were pitted against him. A dozen times he listened at the bulkhead between him and Marie-Anne, and still he heard no movement on the other side.

It was eight o'clock when one of the bateau men appeared at the door and asked if he was ready. Quickly David joined him. He forgot his taunts to

Concombre Bateese, forgot the softly padded gloves in his pack with which he had promised to pommel the half-breed into oblivion. He was thinking only of naked fists.

Into a canoe he followed the bateau man, who turned his craft swiftly in the direction of the opposite shore. And as they went, David was sure he caught the slight movement of a curtain at the little window of Marie-Anne's forward cabin. He smiled back and raised his hand, and at that the curtain was drawn back entirely, and he knew that St. Pierre's wife was watching him as he went to the fight.

The raft was deserted, but a little below it, on a wide strip of beach made hard and smooth by flood water, had gathered a crowd of men. It seemed odd to David they should remain so quiet, when he knew the natural instinct of the riverman was to voice his emotion at the top of his lungs. He spoke of this to the bateau man, who shrugged his shoulders and grinned.

"Eet ees ze command of St. Pierre," he explained. "St. Pierre say no man make beeg noise at—what you call heem—funeral? An' theese goin' to be wan gran' fun-e-*ral,* m'sieu!"

"I see," David nodded. He did not grin back at the other's humor.

He was looking at the crowd. A giant figure had appeared out of the center of it and was coming slowly down to the river. It was St. Pierre. Scarcely had the prow of the canoe touched shore when David leaped

out and hurried to meet him. Behind St. Pierre came Bateese, the half-breed. He was stripped to the waist and naked from the knees down. His gorilla-like arms hung huge and loose at his sides, and the muscles of his hulking body stood out like carven mahogany in the glisten of the morning sun. He was like a grizzly, a human beast of monstrous power, something to look at, to back away from, to fear.

Yet, David scarcely noticed him. He met St. Pierre, faced him, and stopped—and he had gone swiftly to this meeting, so that the chief of the Boulains was within earshot of all his men.

St. Pierre was smiling. He held out his hand as he had held it out once before in the bateau cabin, and his big voice boomed out a greeting.

Carrigan did not answer, nor did he look at the extended hand. For an instant the eyes of the two men met, and then, swift as lightning, Carrigan's arm shot out, and with the flat of his hand he struck St. Pierre a terrific blow squarely on the cheek. The sound of the blow was like the smash of a paddle on smooth water. Not a riverman but heard it, and as St. Pierre staggered back, flung almost from his feet by its force, a subdued cry of amazement broke from the waiting men. Concombre Bateese stood like one stupefied. And then, in another flash, St. Pierre had caught himself and whirled like a wild beast. Every muscle in his body was drawn for a gigantic, overwhelming leap; his eyes blazed; the fury of a beast was in his face.

Before all his people he had suffered the deadliest insult that could be offered a man of the Three River Country —a blow struck with the flat of another's hand. Anything else one might forgive, but not that. Such a blow, if not avenged, was a brand that passed down into the second and third generations, and even children would call out "Yellow-Back—Yellow-Back," to the one who was coward enough to receive it without resentment. A rumbling growl rose in the throat of Concombre Bateese in that moment when it seemed as though St. Pierre Boulain was about to kill the man who had struck him. He saw the promise of his own fight gone in a flash. For no man in all the northland could now fight David Carrigan ahead of St. Pierre.

David waited, prepared to meet the rush of a madman. And then, for a second time, he saw a mighty struggle in the soul of St. Pierre. The giant held himself back. The fury died out of his face, but his great hands remained clenched as he said, for David alone,

"That was a playful blow, m'sieu? It was—a joke?"

"It was for you, St. Pierre," replied Carrigan. "You are a coward—and a skunk. I swam to the raft last night, looked through your window, and saw what happened there. You are not fit for a decent man to fight, yet I will fight you, if you are not too great a coward—and dare to let our wagers stand as they were made."

St. Pierre's eyes widened, and for a breath or two he stared at Carrigan, as if looking into him and not

at him. His big hands relaxed, and slowly the panther-like readiness went out of his body. Those who looked beheld the transformation in amazement, for of all who waited only St. Pierre and the half-breed had heard Carrigan's words, though they had seen and heard the blow of insult.

"You swam to the raft," repeated St. Pierre in a low voice, as if doubting what he had heard. "You looked through the window—and saw——"

David nodded. He could not cover the sneering poison in his voice, his contempt for the man who stood before him.

"Yes, I looked through the window. And I saw you, and the lowest woman on the Three Rivers—the sister of a man I helped to hang. I——"

"Stop!"

St. Pierre's voice broke out of him like the sudden crash of thunder. He came a step nearer, his face livid, his eyes shooting flame. With a mighty effort he controlled himself again. And then, as if he saw something which David could not see, he tried to smile, and in that same instant David caught a grin cutting a great slash across the face of Concombre Bateese. The change that came over St. Pierre now was swift as sunlight coming out from shadowing cloud. A rumble grew in his great chest. It broke in a low note of laughter from his lips, and he faced the bateau across the river.

"M'sieu, you are sorry for *her*. Is that it? You would fight——"

"For the cleanest, finest little girl who ever lived your wife!"

"It is funny," said St. Pierre, as if speaking to himself, and still looking at the bateau. "Yes, it is very funny, *ma belle* Marie-Anne! He has told you he loves you, and he has kissed your hair and held you in his arms—yet he wants to fight me because he thinks I am steeped in sin, and to make me fight in place of Bateese he has called my Carmin a low woman! So what else can I do? I must fight. I must whip him until he can not walk. And then I will send him back for you to nurse, *cherie,* and for that blessing I think he will willingly take my punishment! Is it not so, m'sieu?"

He was smiling and no longer excited when he turned to David.

"M'sieu, I will fight you. And the wagers shall stand. And in this hour let us be honest, like men, and make confession. You love *ma belle* Jeanne—Marie-Anne? Is it not so? And I—I love my Carmin, whose brother you hanged, as I love no other woman in the world. Now, if you will have it so, let us fight!"

He began stripping off his shirt, and with a bellow in his throat Concombre Bateese slouched away like a beaten gorilla to explain to St. Pierre's people the change in the plan of battle. And as that news spread like fire in the fir-tops, there came but a single cry in response—shrill and terrible—and that was from the throat of André, the Broken Man.

XXI

AS Carrigan stripped off his shirt, he knew that at least in one way he had met more than his match in St. Pierre Boulain. In the splendid service of which he was a part he had known many men of iron and steel, men whose nerve and coolness not even death could very greatly disturb. Yet St. Pierre, he conceded, was their master—and his own. For a flash he had transformed the chief of the Boulains into a volcano which had threatened to break in savage fury, yet neither the crash nor destruction had come. And now St. Pierre was smiling again, as Carrigan faced him, stripped to the waist. He betrayed no sign of the tempest of passion that had swept him a few minutes before. His cool, steely eyes had in them a look that was positively friendly, as Concombre Bateese marked in the hard sand the line of the circle within which no man might come. And as he did this and St. Pierre's people crowded close about it, St. Pierre himself spoke in a low voice to David.

"M'sieu, it seems a shame that we should fight. I like you. I have always loved a man who would fight to protect a woman, and I shall be careful not to hurt you more than is necessary to make you see reason—

and to win the wagers. So you need not be afraid of my killing you, as Bateese might have done. And I promise not to destroy your beauty, for the sake of—the lady in the bateau. My Carmin, if she knew you spied through her window last night, would say kill you with as little loss of time as possible, for as regards you her sweet disposition was spoiled when you hung her brother, m'sieu. Yet to me she is an angel!"

Contempt for the man who spoke of his wife and the infamous Carmin Fanchet in the same breath drew a sneer to Carrigan's lips. He nodded toward the waiting circle of men.

"They are ready for the show, St. Pierre. You talk big. Now let us see if you can fight."

For another moment St. Pierre hesitated. "I am so sorry, m'sieu——"

"Are you ready, St. Pierre?"

"It is not fair, and she will never forgive me. You are no match for me. I am half again as heavy."

"And as big a coward as you are a scoundrel, St. Pierre."

"It is like a man fighting a boy."

"Yet it is less dishonorable than betraying the woman who is your wife for another who should have been hanged along with her brother, St. Pierre."

Boulain's face darkened. He drew back half a dozen steps and cried out a word to Bateese. Instantly the circle of waiting men grew tense as the half-breed jerked the big handkerchief from his head and held

it out at arm's length. Yet, with that eagerness for the fight there was something else which Carrigan was swift to sense. The attitude of the watchers was not one of uncertainty or of very great expectation, in spite of the staring faces and the muscular tightening of the line. He knew what was passing in their minds and in the low whispers from lip to lip. They were pitying him. Now that he stood stripped, with only a few paces between him and the giant figure of St. Pierre, the unfairness of the fight struck home even to Concombre Bateese. Only Carrigan himself knew how like tempered steel the sinews of his body were built. But to the eye, in size alone, he stood like a boy before St. Pierre. And St. Pierre's people, their voices stilled by the deadly inequality of it, were waiting for a slaughter and not a fight.

A smile came to Carrigan's lips as he saw Bateese hesitating to drop the handkerchief, and with the swiftness of the trained fighter he made his first plan for the battle before the cloth fell from the half-breed's fingers. As the handkerchief fluttered to the ground, he faced St. Pierre, the smile gone.

"Never smile when you fight," the greatest of all masters of the ring had told him. "Never show anger. Don't betray any emotion at all if you can help it."

Carrigan wondered what the old ring-master would say could he see him now, backing away slowly from St. Pierre as the giant advanced upon him, for he knew his face was betraying to St. Pierre and his people the

deadliest of all sins—anxiety and indecision. Very closely, yet with eyes that seemed to shift uneasily, he watched the effect of his trick on Boulain. Twice the huge riverman followed him about the ring of sand, and the steely glitter in his eyes changed to laughter, and the tense faces of the men about them relaxed. A subdued ripple of merriment rose where there had been silence. A third time David maneuvered his retreat, and his eyes shot furtively to Concombre Bateese and the men at his back. They were grinning. The half-breed's mouth was wide open, and his grotesque body hung limp and astonished. This was not a fight! It was a comedy—like a rooster following a sparrow around a barnyard! And then a still funnier thing happened, for David began to trot in a circle around St. Pierre, dodging and feinting, and keeping always at a safe distance. A howl of laughter came from Bateese and broke in a roar from the men. St. Pierre stopped in his tracks, a grin on his face, his big arms and shoulders limp and unprepared as Carrigan dodged in close and out again. And then——

A howl broke in the middle of the half-breed's throat. Where there had been laughter, there came a sudden shutting off of sound, a great gasp, as if made by choking men. Swifter than anything they had ever seen in human action Carrigan had leaped in. They saw him strike. They heard the blow. They saw St. Pierre's great head rock back, as if struck from his shoulders by a club, and they saw and heard another

blow, and a third—like so many flashes of lightning—and St. Pierre went down as if shot. The man they had laughed at was no longer like a hopping sparrow. He was waiting, bent a little forward, every muscle in his body ready for action. They watched for him to leap upon his fallen enemy, kicking and gouging and choking in the riverman way. But David waited, and St. Pierre staggered to his feet. His mouth was bleeding and choked with sand, and a great lump was beginning to swell over his eye. A deadly fire blazed in his face, as he rushed like a mad bull at the insignificant opponent who had tricked and humiliated him. This time Carrigan did not retreat, but held his ground, and a yell of joy went up from Bateese as the mighty bulk of the giant descended upon his victim. It was an avalanche of brute-force, crushing in its destructiveness, and Carrigan seemed to reach for it as it came upon him. Then his head went down, swifter than a diving grebe, and as St. Pierre's arm swung like an oaken beam over his shoulder, his own shot in straight for the pit of the other's stomach. It was a bull's-eye blow with the force of a pile-driver behind it, and the groan that forced its way out of St. Pierre's vitals was heard by every ear in the cordon of watchers. His weight stopped, his arms opened, and through that opening Carrigan's fist went a second time to the other's jaw, and a second time the great St. Pierre Boulain sprawled out upon the sand. And there he lay, and made no effort to rise.

Concombre Bateese, with his great mouth agape, stood for an instant as if the blow had stunned him in place of his master. Then, suddenly he came to life, and leaped to David's side.

"*Diable! Tonnerre!* You have not fight Concombre Bateese yet!" he howled. "*Non,* you have cheat me, you have lie, you have run lak cat from Concombre Bateese, ze stronges' man on all T'ree River! You are wan' gran' coward, wan poltroon, an' you 'fraid to fight *me,* who ees greates' fightin' man in all dees countree! *Sapristi!* Why you no hit Concombre Bateese, m'sieu? Why you no hit ze greates' fightin' man w'at ees——"

David did not hear the rest. The opportunity was too tempting. He swung, and with a huge grunt the gorilla-like body of Concombre Bateese rolled over that of the chief of the Boulains. This time Carrigan did not wait, but followed up so closely that the half-breed had scarcely gathered the crook out of his knees when another blow on the jaw sent him into the sand again. Three times he tried the experiment of regaining his feet, and three times he was knocked down. After the last blow he raised himself groggily to a sitting posture, and there he remained, blinking like a stunned pig, with his big hands clutching in the sand. He stared up unseeingly at Carrigan, who waited over him, and then stupidly at the transfixed cordon of men, whose eyes were bulging and who were holding their breath in the astonishment of this miracle which had de-

scended upon them. They heard Bateese muttering something incoherent as his head wobbled, and St. Pierre himself seemed to hear it, for he stirred and raised himself slowly, until he also was sitting in the sand, staring at Bateese.

Carrigan picked up his shirt, and the riverman who had brought him from the bateau returned with him to the canoe. There was no demonstration behind them. To David himself the whole thing had been an amazing surprise, and he was not at all reluctant to leave as quickly as his dignity would permit, before some other of St. Pierre's people offered to put a further test upon his prowess. He wanted to laugh. He wanted to thank God at the top of his voice for the absurd run of luck that had made his triumph not only easy but utterly complete. He had expected to win, but he had also expected a terrific fight before the last blow was struck. And there had been no fight! He was returning to the bateau without a scratch, his hair scarcely ruffled, and he had defeated not only St. Pierre, but the giant half-breed as well! It was inconceivable—and yet it had happened; a veritable burlesque, an *opéra-bouffe* affair that might turn quickly into a tragedy if either St. Pierre or Concombre Bateese guessed the truth of it. For in that event he might have to face them again, with the god of luck playing fairly, and he was honest enough with himself to confess that the idea no longer held either thrill or desire for him. Now that he had seen both St.

Pierre and Bateese stripped for battle, he had no further appetite for fistic discussion with them. After all, there was a merit in caution, and he had several lucky stars to bless just at the present moment!

Inwardly he was a bit suspicious of the ultimate ending of the affair. St. Pierre had almost no cause for complaint, for it was his own carelessness, coupled with his opponent's luck, that had been his undoing—and luck and carelessness are legitimate factors of every fight, Carrigan told himself. But with Bateese it was different. He had held up his big jaw, uncovered and tempting, entreating some one to hit him, and Carrigan had yielded to that temptation. The blow would have stunned an ox. Three others like it had left the huge half-breed sitting weak-mindedly in the sand, and no one of those three blows were exactly according to the rules of the game. They had been mightily efficacious, but the half-breed might demand a rehearing when he came fully into his senses.

Not until they were half-way to the bateau did Carrigan dare to glance back over his shoulder at the man who was paddling, to see what effect the fistic travesty had left on him. He was a big-mouthed, clear-eyed, powerfully-muscled fellow, and he was grinning from ear to ear.

"Well, what did you think of it, *comrade?*"

The other gave his shoulders a joyous shrug.

"*Mon Dieu!* Have you heard of wan *garçon* named Joe Clamart, m'sieu? *Non?* Well, I am Joe Clamart

what was once great fightin' man. Bateese hav' whip' me five times, m'sieu—so I say it was wan gr-r-r-a-n' fight! Many years ago I have seen ze same t'ing in Montreal—*ze boxeur de profession. Oui,* an' René Babin pays me fifteen prime martin against which I put up three scrubby red fox that you would win. They were bad, or I would not have gambled, m'sieu. It ees fonny!"

"Yes, it is funny," agreed David. "I think it is a bit too funny. It is a pity they did not stand up on their legs a little longer!" Suddenly an inspiration hit him. "Joe, what do you say—shall you and I return and put up a *real* fight for them?"

Like a sprung trap Joe Clamart's grinning mouth closed. "*Non, non, non,*" he grunted. "Dere has been plenty fight, an' Joe Clamart mus' save hees face for Antoinette Roland, who hate ze sign of fight lak she hate ze devil, m'sieu! *Non, non!*"

His paddle dug deeper into the water, and David's heart felt lighter. If Joe was an average barometer, and he was a husky and fearless-looking chap, it was probable that neither St. Pierre nor Bateese would demand another chance at him, and St. Pierre would pay his wager.

He could see no one aboard the bateau when he climbed from the canoe. Looking back, he saw that two other canoes had started from the opposite shore. Then he went to his cabin door, opened it, and entered. Scarcely had the door closed behind him when he

stopped, staring toward the window that opened on the river.

Standing full in the morning glow of it was Marie-Anne Boulain. She was facing him. Her cheeks were flushed. Her red lips were parted. Her eyes were aglow with a fire which she made no effort to hide from him. In her hand she still held the binoculars he had left on the cabin table. He guessed the truth. Through the glasses she had watched the whole miserable fiasco.

He felt creeping over him a sickening shame, and his eyes fell slowly from her to the table. What he saw there caught his breath in the middle. It was the entire surgical outfit of Nepapinas, the old Indian doctor. And there were basins of water, and white strips of linen ready for use, and a pile of medicated cotton, and all sorts of odds and ends that one might apply to ease the agonies of a dying man. And beyond the table, huddled in so small a heap that he was almost hidden by it, was Nepapinas himself, disappointment writ in his mummy-like face as his beady eyes rested on David.

The evidence could not be mistaken. They had expected him to come back more nearly dead than alive, and St. Pierre's wife had prepared for the thing she had thought inevitable. Even his bed was nicely turned down, its fresh white sheets inviting an occupant!

And David, looking at St. Pierre's wife again, felt his heart beating hard in his breast at the look which

was in her eyes. It was not the scintillation of laughter, and the flame in her cheeks was not embarrassment. She was not amused. The ludicrousness of her mislaid plans had not struck her as they had struck him. She had placed the binoculars on the table, and slowly she came to him. Her hands reached out, and her fingers rested like the touch of velvet on his arms.

"It was splendid!" she said softly. "It was splendid!"

She was very near, her breast almost touching him, her hands creeping up until the tips of her fingers rested on his shoulders, her scarlet mouth so close he could feel the soft breath of it in his face.

"It was splendid!" she whispered again.

And then, suddenly, she rose up on her tiptoes and kissed him. So swiftly was it done that she was gone before he sensed that wild touch of her lips against his own. Like a swallow she was at the door, and the door opened and closed behind her, and for a moment he heard the quick running of her feet. Then he looked at the old Indian, and the Indian, too, was staring at the door through which St. Pierre's wife had flown.

XXII

FOR many seconds that seemed like minutes David stood where she had left him, while Nepapinas rose gruntingly to his feet, and gathered up his belongings, and hobbled sullenly to the bateau door and out. He was scarcely conscious of the Indian's movement, for his soul was aflame with a red-hot fire. Deliberately—with that ravishing glory of something in her eyes—St. Pierre's wife had kissed him! On her tiptoes, her cheeks like crimson flowers, she had given her still redder lips to him! And his own lips burned, and his heart pounded hard, and he stared for a time like one struck dumb at the spot where she had stood by the window. Then suddenly, he turned to the door and flung it wide open, and on his lips was the reckless cry of Marie-Anne's name. But St. Pierre's wife was gone, and Nepapinas was gone, and at the tail of the big sweep sat only Joe Clamart, guarding watchfully.

The two canoes were drawing near, and in one of them were two men, and in the other three, and David knew that—like Joe Clamart—they were watchers set over him by St. Pierre. Then a fourth canoe left the far shore, and when it had reached mid-stream, he

recognized the figure in the stern as that of André, the Broken Man. The other, he thought, must be St. Pierre.

He went back into the cabin and stood where Marie Anne had stood—at the window. Nepapinas had not taken away the basins of water, and the bandages were still there, and the pile of medicated cotton, and the suspiciously made-up bed. After all, he was losing something by not occupying the bed—and yet if St Pierre or Bateese had messed him up badly, and a couple of fellows had lugged him in between them, it was probable that Marie-Anne would not have kissed him. And that kiss of St. Pierre's wife would remain with him until the day he died!

He was thinking of it, the swift, warm thrill of her velvety lips, red as strawberries and twice as sweet, when the door opened and St. Pierre came in The sight of him, in this richest moment of his life, gave David no sense of humiliation or shame. Between him and St. Pierre rose swiftly what he had seen last night—Carmin Fanchet in all the lure of her disheveled beauty, crushed close in the arms of the man whose wife only a moment before had pressed her lips close to his; and as the eyes of the two met, there came over him a desire to tell the other what had happened, that he might see him writhe with the sting of the two-edged thing with which he was playing. Then he saw that even that would not hurt St Pierre, for the chief of the Boulains, standing there

with the big lump over his eye, had caught sight of the things on the table and the nicely turned down bed, and his one good eye lit up with sudden laughter, and his white teeth flashed in an understanding smile.

"*Tonnerre,* I said she would nurse you with gentle hands," he rumbled. "See what you have missed, M'sieu Carrigan!"

"I received something which I shall remember longer than a fine nursing," retorted David. "And yet right now I have a greater interest in knowing what you think of the fight, St. Pierre—and if you have come to pay your wager."

St. Pierre was chuckling mysteriously in his throat. "It was splendid—splendid," he said, repeating Marie-Anne's words. "And Joe Clamart says she ran out, blushing like a red rose in August, and that she said no word, but flew like a bird into the white-birch ashore!"

"She was dismayed because I beat you, St. Pierre."

"*Non, non*—she was like a lark filled with joy."

Suddenly his eyes rested on the binoculars.

David nodded. "Yes, she saw it all through the glasses."

St. Pierre seated himself at the table and heaved out a groan as he took one of the bandage strips between his fingers. "She saw my disgrace. And she didn't wait to bandage *me* up, did she?"

"Perhaps she thought Carmin Fanchet would do that, St. Pierre."

"And I am ashamed to go to Carmin—with this

great lump over my eye, m'sieu. And on top of that disgrace—you insist that I pay the wager?"

"I do."

St. Pierre's face hardened.

"*Oui,* I am to pay. I am to tell you all I know about that *bête noir*—Black Roger Audemard. Is it not so?"

"That is the wager."

"But after I have told you—what then? Do you recall that I gave you any other guarantee, M'sieu Carrigan? Did I say I would let you go? Did I promise I would not kill you and sink your body to the bottom of the river? If I did, I can not remember."

"Are you a beast, St. Pierre—a murderer as well as——"

"Stop! Do not tell me again what you saw through the window, for it has nothing to do with this. I am not a beast, but a man. Had I been a beast, I should have killed you the first day I saw you in this cabin. I am not threatening to kill you, and yet it may be necessary if you insist that I pay the wager. You understand, m'sieu. To refuse to pay a wager is a greater crime among my people than the killing of a man, if there is a good reason for the killing. I am helpless. I must pay, if you insist. Before I pay it is fair that I give you warning."

"You mean?"

"I mean nothing, as yet. I can not say what it will be necessary for me to do, after you have heard what I know about Roger Audemard. I am quite

settled on a plan just now, m'sieu, but the plan might change at any moment. I am only warning you that it is a great hazard, and that you are playing with a fire of which you know nothing, because it has not burned you yet."

Carrigan seated himself slowly in a chair opposite St. Pierre, with the table between them.

"You are wasting time in attempting to frighten me," he said. "I shall insist on the payment of the wager, St. Pierre."

For a moment St. Pierre was clearly troubled. Then his lips tightened, and he smiled grimly over the table at David.

"I am sorry, M'sieu David. I like you. You are a fighting man and no coward, and I should like to travel shoulder to shoulder with you in many things. And such a thing might be, for you do not understand. I tell you it would have been many times better for you had I whipped you out there, and it had been you—and not me—to pay the wager!"

"It is Roger Audemard I am interested in, St. Pierre. Why do you hesitate?"

"I? Hesitate? I am not hesitating, m'sieu. I am giving you a chance." He leaned forward, his great arms bent on the table. "And you insist, M'sieu David?"

"Yes, I insist."

Slowly the fingers of St. Pierre's hands closed into knotted fists, and he said in a low voice, "Then I will pay, m'sieu. *I am Roger Audemard!*"

XXIII

THE astounding statement of the man who sat opposite him held David speechless. He had guessed at some mysterious relationship between St. Pierre and the criminal he was after, but not this, and Roger Audemard, with his hands unclenching and a slow humor beginning to play about his mouth, waited coolly for him to recover from his amazement. In those moments, when his heart seemed to have stopped beating, Carrigan was staring at the other, but his mind had shot beyond him—to the woman who was his wife. Marie-Anne *Audemard*—the wife of Black Roger! He wanted to cry out against the possibility of such a fact, yet he sat like one struck dumb, as the monstrous truth took possession of his brain and a whirlwind of understanding swept upon him. He was thinking quickly, and with a terrific lack of sentiment now. Opposite him sat Black Roger, the wholesale murderer. Marie-Anne was his wife. Carmin Fanchet, sister of a murderer, was simply one of his kind. And Bateese, the man-gorilla, and the Broken Man, and all the dark-skinned pack about them were of Black Roger's breed and kind. Love for a woman had blinded him to the facts which crowded upon him

now. Like a lamb he had fallen among wolves, and he had tried to believe in them. No wonder Bateese and the man he had known as St. Pierre had betrayed such merriment at times!

A fighting coolness possessed him as he spoke to Black Roger.

"I will admit this is a surprise. And yet you have cleared up a number of things very quickly. It proves to me again that comedy is not very far removed from tragedy at times."

"I am glad you see the humor of it, M'sieu David." Black Roger was smiling as pleasantly as his swollen eye would permit. "We must not be too serious when we die. If I were to die a-hanging, I would sing as the rope choked me, just to show the world one need not be unhappy because his life is coming to an end."

"I suppose you understand that ultimately I am going to give you that opportunity," said David.

Almost eagerly Black Roger leaned toward him over the table. "You believe you are going to hang me?"

"I am sure of it."

"And you are willing to wager the point, M'sieu David?"

"It is impossible to gamble with a condemned man."

Black Roger chuckled, rubbing his big hands together until they made a rasping sound, and his one good eye glowed at Carrigan.

"Then I will make a wager with myself, M'sieu

David. *Ma foi,* I swear that before the leaves fall from the trees, you will be pleading for the friendship of Black Roger Audemard, and you will be as much in love with Carmin Fanchet as I am! And as for Marie-Anne——"

He thrust back his chair and rose to his feet, the old note of subdued laughter rumbling in his chest. "And because I make this wager with myself, I cannot kill you, M'sieu David—though that might be the best thing to do. I am going to take you to the Château Boulain, which is in the forests of the Yellowknife, beyond the Great Slave. Nothing will happen to you if you make no effort to escape. If you do that, you will surely die. And that would hurt me, M'sieu David, because I love you like a brother, and in the end I know you are going to grip the hand of Black Roger Audemard, and get down on your knees to Carmin Fanchet. And as for Marie-Anne——"

Again he interrupted himself, and went out of the cabin, laughing. And there was no mistake in the metallic click of the lock outside the door.

For a time David did not move from his seat near the table. He had not let Roger Audemard see how completely the confession had upset his inner balance, but he made no pretense of concealing the thing from himself now. He was in the power of a cut-throat, who in turn had an army of cut-throats at his back, and both Marie-Anne and Carmin Fanchet were a part of this ring. And he was not only a prisoner. It

was probable, under the circumstances, that Black Roger would make an end of him when a convenient moment came. It was even more than a probability. It was a grim necessity. To let him live and escape would be fatal to Black Roger.

From back of these convictions, riding over them as if to demoralize any coherence and logic that might go with the evidence he was building up, came question after question, pounding at him one after the other, until his mind became more than ever a whirling chaos of uncertainty. If St. Pierre was Black Roger, why would he confess to that fact simply to pay a wager? What reason could he have for letting him live at all? Why had not Bateese killed him? Why had Marie-Anne nursed him back to life? His mind shot to the white strip of sand in which he had nearly died. That, at least, was convincing. Learning in some way that he was after Black Roger, they had attempted to do away with him there. But if that were so, why was it Bateese and Black Roger's wife and the Indian Nepapinas had risked so much to make him live, when if they had left him where he had fallen he would have died and caused them no trouble?

There was something exasperatingly uncertain and illogical about it all. Was it possible that St. Pierre Boulain was playing a huge joke on him? Even that was inconceivable. For there was Carmin Fanchet, a fitting companion for a man like Black Roger, and there

was Marie-Anne, who, if it had been a joke, would not have played her part so well.

Suddenly his mind was filled only with her. Had she been his friend, using all her influence to protect him, because her heart was sick of the environment of which she was a part? His own heart jumped at the thought. It was easy to believe. In Marie-Anne he had faith, and that faith refused to be destroyed, but persisted—even clearer and stronger as he thought again of Carmin Fanchet and Black Roger. In his heart grew the conviction it was sacrilege to believe the kiss she had given him that morning was a lie. It was something else—a spontaneous gladness, a joyous exultation that he had returned unharmed, a thing unplanned in the soul of the woman, leaping from her before she could stop it. Then had come shame, and she had run away from him so swiftly he had not seen her face again after the touch of her lips. If it had been a subterfuge, a lie, she would not have done that.

He rose to his feet and paced restlessly back and forth as he tried to bring together a few tangled bits of the puzzle. He heard voices outside, and very soon felt the movement of the bateau under his feet, and through one of the shoreward windows he saw trees and sandy beach slowly drifting away. On that shore, as far as his eyes could travel up and down, he saw no sign of Marie-Anne, but there remained a canoe, and near the canoe stood Black Roger Audemard, and

beyond him, huddled like a charred stump in the sand, was André, the Broken Man. On the opposite shore the raft was getting under way.

During the next half-hour several things happened which told him there was no longer a sugar-coating to his imprisonment. On each side of the bateau two men worked at his windows, and when they had finished, no one of them could be opened more than a few inches. Then came the rattle of the lock at the door, the grating of a key, and somewhat to Carrigan's surprise it was Bateese who came in. The half-breed bore no facial evidence of the paralyzing blows which had knocked him out a short time before. His jaw, on which they had landed, was as aggressive as ever, yet in his face and his attitude, as he stared curiously at Carrigan, there was no sign of resentment or unfriendliness. Nor did he seem to be ashamed. He merely stared, with the curious and rather puzzled eyes of a small boy gazing at an inexplicable oddity. Carrigan, standing before him, knew what was passing in the other's mind, and the humor of it brought a smile to his lips.

Instantly Concombre's face split into a wide grin. "*Mon Dieu,* w'at if you was on'y brother to Concombre Bateese, m'sieu. T'ink of zat—you—me—*frère d'armes! Ventre saint gris,* but we mak' all fightin' men in nort' countree run lak rabbits ahead of ze fox! *Oui,* we mak' gr-r-r-eat pair, m'sieu—you, w'at knock down Bateese—an' Bateese, w'at keel polar bear wit'

hees naked hands, w'at pull down trees, w'at chew flint w'en hees tobacco gone."

His voice had risen, and suddenly there came a laugh from outside the door, and Concombre cut himself short and his mouth closed with a snap. It was Joe Clamart who had laughed.

"I w'ip heem five time, an' now I w'ip heem seex!" hissed Bateese in an undertone. "Two time each year I w'ip zat *garçon* Joe Clamart so he understan' w'at good fightin' man ees. An' you will w'ip heem, eh, m'sieu? *Oui?* An' I will breeng odder good fightin' mans for you to w'ip—all w'at Concombre Bateese has w'ipped—ten, dozen, forty—an' you w'ip se gran' bunch, m'sieu. Eh, shall we mak' ze bargain?"

"You are planning a pleasant time for me, Bateese," said Carrigan, "but I am afraid it will be impossible. You see, this captain of yours, Black Roger Audemard——"

"W'at!" Bateese jumped as if stung. "W'at you say, m'sieu?"

"I said that Roger Audemard, Black Roger, the man I thought was St. Pierre Boulain——"

Carrigan said no more. What he had started to say was unimportant compared with the effect of Roger Audemard's name on Concombre Bateese. A deadly light glittered in the half-breed's eyes, and for the first time David realized that in the grotesque head of the riverman was a brain quick to grip at the significance of things. The fact was evident that Black

Roger had not confided in Bateese as to the price of the wager and the confession of his identity, and for a moment after the repetition of Audemard's name came from David's lips the half-breed stood as if something had stunned him. Then slowly, as if forcing the words in the face of a terrific desire that had transformed his body into a hulk of quivering steel, he said:

"M'sieu—I come with message—from St. Pierre. You see windows—closed. Outside door—she locked. On bot' sides de bateau, all de time, we watch. You try get away, an' we keel you. Zat ees all. We shoot. We five mans on ze bateau, all ze day, *toute la nuit.* You unnerstan'?"

He turned sullenly, waiting for no reply, and the door opened and closed after him—and again came the snap of the lock outside.

Steadily the bateau swept down the big river that day. There was no let-up in the steady creaking of the long sweep. Even in the swifter currents David could hear the working of it, and he knew he had seen the last of the more slowly moving raft. Near one of the partly open windows he heard two men talking just before the bateau shot into the Brule Point rapids. They were strange voices. He learned that Audemard's huge raft was made up of thirty-five cribs, seven abreast, and that nine times between the Point Brule and the Yellowknife the raft would be split up,

so that each crib could be run through dangerous rapids by itself.

That would be a big job, David assured himself. It would be slow work as well as hazardous, and as his own life was in no immediate jeopardy, he would have ample time in which to formulate some plan of action for himself. At the present moment, it seemed, the one thing for him to do was to wait—and behave himself, according to the half-breed's instructions. There was, when he came to think about it, a saving element of humor about it all. He had always wanted to make a trip down the Three Rivers in a bateau. And now—he was making it!

At noon a guard brought in his dinner. He could not recall that he had ever seen this man before, a tall, lithe fellow built to run like a hound, and who wore a murderous-looking knife at his belt. As the door opened, David caught a glimpse of two others. They were business-like looking individuals, with muscles built for work or fight; one sitting cross-legged on the bateau deck with a rifle over his knees, and the other standing with a rifle in his hand. The man who brought his dinner wasted no time or words. He merely nodded, murmured a curt *bonjour,* and went out. And Carrigan, as he began to eat, did not have to tell himself twice that Audemard had been particular in his selection of the bateau's crew, and that the eyes of the men he had seen could be as keen as a hawk's when leveled over the tip of a rifle barrel. They meant

business, and he felt no desire to smile in the face of them, as he had smiled at Concombre Bateese.

It was another man, and a stranger, who brought in his supper. And for two hours after that, until the sun went down and gloom began to fall, the bateau sped down the river. It had made forty miles that day, he figured.

It was still light when the bateau was run ashore and tied up, but tonight there were no singing voices or wild laughter of men whose hours of play-time and rest had come. To Carrigan, looking through his window, there was an oppressive menace about it all. The shadowy figures ashore were more like a death-watch than a guard, and to dispel the gloom of it he lighted two of the lamps in the cabin, whistled, drummed a simple chord he knew on the piano, and finally settled down to smoking his pipe. He would have welcomed the company of Bateese, or Joe Clamart, or one of the guards, and as his loneliness grew upon him there was something of companionship even in the subdued voices he heard occasionally outside. He tried to read, but the printed words jumbled themselves and meant nothing.

It was ten o'clock, and clouds had darkened the night, when through his open windows he heard a shout coming from the river. Twice it came before it was answered from the bateau, and the second time Carrigan recognized it as the voice of Roger Audemard. A brief interval passed between that and the scraping

of a canoe alongside, and then there was a low conversation in which even Audemard's great voice was subdued, and after that the grating of a key in the lock, and the opening of the door, and Black Roger came in, bearing an Indian reed basket under his arm. Carrigan did not rise to meet him. It was not like the coming of the old St. Pierre, and on Black Roger's lips there was no twist of a smile, nor in his eyes the flash of good-natured greeting. His face was darkly stern, as if he had traveled far and hard on an unpleasant mission, but in it there was no shadow of menace, as there had been in that of Concombre Bateese. It was rather the face of a tired man, and yet David knew what he saw was not physical exhaustion. Black Roger guessed something of his thought, and his mouth for an instant repressed a smile.

"Yes, I have been having a rough time," he nodded. "This is for you!"

He placed the basket on the table. It held half a bushel, and was filled to the curve of the handle. What lay in it was hidden under a cloth securely tied about it.

"And you are responsible," he added, stretching himself in a chair with a gesture of weariness. "I should kill you, Carrigan. And instead of that I bring you good things to eat! Half the day she has been fussing with the things in the basket, and then insisted that I bring them to you. And I have brought them simply to tell you another thing. I am sorry for her. I think, M'sieu Carrigan, you will find as many tears in the

basket as anything else, for her heart is crushed and sick because of the humiliation she brought upon herself this morning."

He was twisting his big, rough hands, and David's own heart went sick as he saw the furrowed lines that had deepened in the other's face. Black Roger did not look at him as he went on.

"Of course, she told me. She tells me everything. And if she knew I was telling you this, I think she would kill herself. But I want you to understand. She is not what you might think she is. That kiss came from the lips of the best woman God ever made, M'sieu Carrigan!"

David, with the blood in him running like fire, heard himself answering, "I know it. She was excited, glad you had not stained your hands with my life——"

This time Audemard smiled, but it was the smile of a man ten years older than he had appeared yesterday. "Don't try to answer, m'sieu. I only want you to know she is as pure as the stars. It was unfortunate, but to follow the impulse of one's heart can not be a sin. Everything has been unfortunate since you came. But I blame no one, except——"

"Carmin Fanchet?"

Audemard nodded. "Yes. I have sent her away. Marie-Anne is in the cabin on the raft now. But even Carmin I can not blame very greatly, m'sieu, for it is impossible to hold anything against one you love. Tell me if I am right? You must know. You love

my Marie-Anne. Do you hold anything against her?"

"It is unfair," protested David. "She is your wife. Audemard, is it possible you don't love her?"

"Yes, I love her."

"And Carmin Fanchet?"

"I love her, too. They are so different. Yet I love them both. Is it not possible for a big heart like mine to do that, m'sieu?"

With almost a snort David rose to his feet and stared through one of the windows into the darkness of the river. "Black Roger," he said without turning his head, "the evidence at Headquarters condemns you as one of the blackest-hearted murderers that ever lived. But that crime, to me, is less atrocious than the one you are committing against your own wife. I am not ashamed to confess I love her, because to deny it would be a lie. I love her so much that I would sacrifice myself—soul and body—if that sacrifice could give you back to her, clean and undefiled and with your hand unstained by the crime for which you must hang!"

He did not hear Roger Audemard as he rose from his chair. For a moment the riverman stared at the back of David's head, and in that moment he was fighting to keep back what wanted to come from his lips in words. He turned before David faced him again, and did not pause until he stood at the cabin door with his hand at the latch. There he was partly in shadow.

"I shall not see you again until you reach the Yellowknife," he said. "Not until then will you know—or

will I know—what is going to happen. I think you will understand strange things then, but that is for the hour to tell. Bateese has explained to you that you must not make an effort to escape. You would regret it, and so would I. If you have red blood in you, m'sieu—if you would understand all that you cannot understand now—wait as patiently as you can. *Bonne nuit,* M'sieu Carrigan!"

"Good night!" nodded David.

In the pale shadows he thought a mysterious light of gladness illumined Black Roger's face before the door opened and closed, leaving him alone again.

XXIV

WITH the going of Black Roger also went the oppressive loneliness which had gripped Carrigan, and as he stood listening to the low voices outside, the undeniable truth came to him that he did not hate this man as he wanted to hate him. He was a murderer, and a scoundrel in another way, but he felt irresistibly the impulse to like him and to feel sorry for him. He made an effort to shake off the feeling, but a small voice which he could not quiet persisted in telling him that more than one good man had committed what the law called murder, and that perhaps he didn't fully understand what he had seen through the cabin window on the raft. And yet, when unstirred by this impulse, he knew the evidence was damning.

But his loneliness was gone. With Audemard's visit had come an unexpected thrill, the revival of an almost feverish anticipation, the promise of impending things that stirred his blood as he thought of them. "You will understand strange things then," Roger Audemard had said, and something in his voice had been like a key unlocking mysterious doors for the first time. And then, "Wait, as patiently as you can!"

Out of the basket on the table seemed to come to him a whispering echo of that same word—wait! He laid his hands upon it, and a pulse of life came with the imagined whispering. It was from Marie-Anne. It seemed as though the warmth of her hands were still there, and as he removed the cloth the sweet breath of her came to him. And then, in the next instant, he was trying to laugh at himself and trying equally hard to call himself a fool, for it was the breath of newly-baked things which her fingers had made.

Yet never had he felt the warmth of her presence more strangely in his heart. He did not try to explain to himself why Roger Audemard's visit had broken down things which had seemed insurmountable an hour ago. Analysis was impossible, because he knew the transformation within himself was without a shred of reason. But it had come, and with it his imprisonment took on another form. Where before there had been thought of escape and a scheming to jail Black Roger, there filled him now an intense desire to reach the Yellowknife and the Château Boulain.

It was after midnight when he went to bed, and he was up with the early dawn. With the first break of day the bateau men were preparing their breakfast. David was glad. He was eager for the day's work to begin, and in that eagerness he pounded on the door and called out to Joe Clamart that he was ready for his breakfast with the rest of them, but that he wanted

only hot coffee to go with what Black Roger had brought to him in the basket.

That afternoon the bateau passed Fort McMurray, and before the sun was well down in the west Carrigan saw the green slopes of Thickwood Hills and the rising peaks of Birch Mountains. He laughed outright as he thought of Corporal Anderson and Constable Frazer at Fort McMurray, whose chief duty was to watch the big waterway. How their eyes would pop if they could see through the padlocked door of his prison! But he had no inclination to be discovered now. He wanted to go on, and with a growing exultation he saw there was no intention on the part of the bateau's crew to loiter on the way. There was no stop at noon, and the tie-up did not come until the last glow of day was darkening into the gloom of night in the sky. For sixteen hours the bateau had traveled steadily, and it could not have made less than sixty miles as the river ran. The raft, David figured, had not traveled a third of the distance.

The fact that the bateau's progress would bring him to Château Boulain many days, and perhaps weeks, before Black Roger and Marie-Anne could arrive on the raft did not check his enthusiasm. It was this interval between their arrivals which held a great speculative promise for him. In that time, if his efficiency had not entirely deserted him, he would surely make discoveries of importance.

Day after day the journey continued without rest.

On the fourth day after leaving Fort McMurray it was Joe Clamart who brought in David's supper, and he grunted a protest at his long hours of muscle-breaking labor at the sweeps. When David questioned him he shrugged his shoulders, and his mouth closed tight as a clam. On the fifth, the bateau crossed the narrow western neck of Lake Athabasca, slipping past Chipewyan in the night, and on the sixth it entered the Slave River. It was the fourteenth day when the bateau entered Great Slave Lake, and the second night after that, as dusk gathered thickly between the forest walls of the Yellowknife, David knew that at last they had reached the mouth of the dark and mysterious stream which led to the still more mysterious domain of Black Roger Audemard.

That night the rejoicing of the bateau men ashore was that of men who had come out from under a strain and were throwing off its tension for the first time in many days. A great fire was built, and the men sang and laughed and shouted as they piled wood upon it. In the flare of this fire a smaller one was built, and kettles and pans were soon bubbling and sizzling over it, and a great coffee pot that held two gallons sent out its steam laden with an aroma that mingled joyously with the balsam and cedar smells in the air. David could see the whole thing from his window, and when Joe Clamart came in with supper, he found the meat they were cooking over the fire was fresh moose steak. As there had been no trading or firing of guns

coming down, he was puzzled and when he asked where the meat had come from Joe Clamart only shrugged his shoulders and winked an eye, and went out singing about the *allouette* bird that had everything plucked from it, one by one. But David noticed there were never more than four men ashore at the same time. At least one was always aboard the bateau, watching his door and windows.

And he, too, felt the thrill of an excitement working subtly within him, and this thrill pounded in swifter running blood when he saw the men about the fire jump to their feet suddenly and go to meet new and shadowy figures that came up indistinctly just in the edge of the forest gloom. There they mingled and were lost in identity for a long time, and David wondered if the newcomers were of the people of Château Boulain. After that, Bateese and Joe Clamart and two others stamped out the fires and came over the plank to the bateau to sleep. David followed their example and went to bed.

The cook fires were burning again before the gray dawn was broken by a tint of the sun, and when the voices of many men roused David, he went to his window and saw a dozen figures where last night there had been only four. When it grew lighter he recognized none of them. All were strangers. Then he realized the significance of their presence. The batean had been traveling north, but downstream. Now it would still travel north, but the water of the Yellow-

knife flowed south into Great Slave Lake, and the bateau must be towed. He caught a glimpse of the two big York boats a little later, and six rowers to a boat, and after that the bateau set out slowly but steadily upstream.

For hours David was at one window or the other, with something of awe working inside him as he saw what they were passing through—and between. He fancied the water trail was like an entrance into a forbidden land, a region of vast and unbroken mystery, a country of enchantment, possibly of death, shut out from the world he had known. For the stream narrowed, and the forest along the shores was so dense he could not see into it. The tree-tops hung in a tangled canopy overhead, and a gloom of twilight filled the channel below, so that where the sun shot through, it was like filtered moonlight shining on black oil. There was no sound except the dull, steady beat of the rowers' oars, and the ripple of water along the sides of the bateau. The men did not sing or laugh, and if they talked it must have been in whispers. There was no cry of birds from ashore. And once David saw Joe Clamart's face as he passed the window, and it was set and hard and filled with the superstition of a man who was passing through a devil-country.

And then suddenly the end of it came. A flood of sunlight burst in at the windows, and all at once voices came from ahead, a laugh, a shout, and a yell of rejoicing from the bateau, and Joe Clamart started again

the everlasting song of the *allouette* bird that was plucked of everything it had. Carrigan found himself grinning. They were a queer people, these bred-in-the-blood northerners—still moved by the superstitions of children. Yet he conceded that the awesome deadness of the forest passage had put strange thoughts into his own heart.

Before nightfall Bateese and Joe Clamart came in and tied his arms behind him, and he was taken ashore with the rumble of a waterfall in his ears. For two hours he watched the labors of the men as they beached the bateau on long rollers of smooth birch and rolled it foot by foot over a cleared trail until it was launched again above the waterfall. Then he was led back into the cabin and his arms freed. That night he went to sleep with the music of the waterfall in his ears.

The second day the Yellowknife seemed to be no longer a river, but a narrow lake, and the third day the rowers came into the Nine Lake country at noon, and until another dusk the bateau threaded its way through twisting channels and impenetrable forests, and beached at last at the edge of a great open where the timber had been cut. There was more excitement here, but it was too dark for David to understand the meaning of it. There were many voices; dogs barked. Then voices were at his door, a key rattled in the lock, and it opened. David saw Bateese and Joe Clamart first. And then, to his amazement, Black Roger Aude-

mard stood there, smiling at him and nodding good-evening.

It was impossible for David to repress his astonishment.

"Welcome to Château Boulain," greeted Black Roger. "You are surprised? Well, I beat you out by half a dozen hours—in a canoe, m'sieu. It is only courtesy that I should be here to give you welcome!"

Behind him Bateese and Joe Clamart were grinning widely, and then both came in, and Joe Clamart picked up his dunnage-sack and threw it over his shoulder.

"If you will come with us, m'sieu——"

David followed, and when he stepped ashore there were Bateese, and Joe Clamart and one other behind him, and three or four shadowy figures ahead, with Black Roger walking at his side. There were no more voices, and the dog had ceased barking. Ahead was a wall of darkness, which was the deep black forest beyond the clearing, and into it led a trail which they followed. It was a path worn smooth by the travel of many feet, and for a mile not a star broke through the tree-tops overhead, nor did a flash of light break the utter chaos of the way but once, when Joe Clamart lighted his pipe. No one spoke. Even Black Roger was silent, and David found no word to say.

At the end of the mile the trees began to open above their heads, and they soon came to the edge of the timber. In the darkness David caught his breath. Dead ahead, not a rifle shot away, was the Château Boulain.

He knew it before Black Roger had said a word. He guessed it by the lighted windows, full a score of them, without a curtain drawn to shut out their illumination from the night. He could see nothing but these lights, yet they measured off a mighty place to be built of logs in the heart of a wilderness, and at his side he heard Black Roger chuckling in low exultation.

"Our home, m'sieu," he said. "Tomorrow, when you see it in the light of day, you will say it is the finest château in the north—all built of sweet cedar where birch is not used, so that even in the deep snows it gives us the perfume of springtime and flowers."

David did not answer, and in a moment Audemard said:

"Only on Christmas and New Year and at birthdays and wedding feasts is it lighted up like that. Tonight it is in your honor, M'sieu David." Again he laughed softly, and under his breath he added, "And there is some one waiting for you there whom you will be surprised to see!"

David's heart gave a jump. There was meaning in Black Roger's words and no double twist to what he meant. Marie-Anne had come ahead with her husband!

Now, as they passed on to the brilliantly lighted château, David made out the indistinct outlines of other buildings almost hidden in the out-creeping shadows of the forest-edges, with now and then a ray of light to show people were in them. But there was

a brooding silence over it all which made him wonder, for there was no voice, no bark of dog, not even the opening or closing of a door. As they drew nearer, he saw a great veranda reaching the length of the château, with screening to keep out the summer pests of mosquitoes and flies and the night prowling insects attracted by light. Into this they went, up wide birch steps, and ahead of them was a door so heavy it looked like the postern gate of a castle. Black Roger opened it, and in a moment David stood beside him in a dimly lighted hall where the mounted heads of wild beasts looked down like startled things from the gloom of the walls. And then David heard the low, sweet notes of a piano coming to them very faintly.

He looked at Black Roger. A smile was on the lips of the château master; his head was up, and his eyes glowed with pride and joy as the music came to him. He spoke no word, but laid a hand on David's arm and led him toward it, while Bateese and Joe Clamart remained standing at the entrance to the hall. David's feet trod in thick rugs of fur; he saw the dim luster of polished birch and cedar in the walls, and over his head the ceiling was rich and matched, as in the bateau cabin. They drew nearer to the music and came to a closed door. This Black Roger opened very quietly, as if anxious not to disturb the one who was playing.

They entered, and David held his breath. It was a great room he stood in, thirty feet or more from end to end, and scarcely less in width—a room brilliant with

light, sumptuous in its comfort, sweet with the perfume of wild-flowers, and with a great black fireplace at the end of it, from over which there stared at him the glass eyes of a monster moose. Then he saw the figure at the piano, and something rose up quickly and choked him when his eyes told him it was not Marie-Anne. It was a slim, beautiful figure in a soft and shimmering white gown, and its head was glowing gold in the lamplight.

Roger Audemard spoke, "Carmin!"

The woman at the piano turned about, a little startled at the unexpectedness of the voice, and then rose quickly to her feet—and David Carrigan found himself looking into the eyes of Carmin Fanchet!

Never had he seen her more beautiful than in this moment, like an angel in her shimmering dress of white, her hair a radiant glory, her eyes wide and glowing—and, as she looked at him, a smile coming to her red lips. Yes, *she was smiling at him*—this woman whose brother he had brought to the hangman, this woman who had stolen Black Roger from another! She knew him—he was sure of that; she knew him as the man who had believed her a criminal along with her brother, and who had fought to the last against her freedom. Yet from her lips and her eyes and her face the old hatred was gone. She was coming toward him slowly; she was reaching out her hand, and half blindly his own went out, and he felt the warmth of her fingers for a moment, and he heard her voice saying softly,

"Welcome to Château Boulain, M'sieu Carrigan."

He bowed and mumbled something, and Black Roger gently pressed his arm, drawing him back to the door. As he went he saw again that Carmin Fanchet was very beautiful as she stood there, and that her lips were very red—but her face was white, whiter than he had ever seen the face of a woman before.

As they went up a winding stair to the second floor, Roger Audemard said, "I am proud of my Carmin, M'sieu David. Would any other woman in the world have given her hand like that to the man who had helped to kill her brother?"

They stopped at another door. Black Roger opened it. There were lights within, and David knew it was to be his room. Audemard did not follow him inside, but there was a flashing humor in his eyes.

"I say, is there another woman like her in the world, m'sieu?"

"What have you done to Marie-Anne—your wife?" asked David.

It was hard for him to get the words out. A terrible thing was gripping at his throat, and the clutch of it grew tighter as he saw the wild light in Black Roger's eyes.

"Tomorrow you will know, m'sieu. But not tonight. You must wait until tomorrow."

He nodded and stepped back, and the door closed—and in the same instant came the harsh grating of a key in the lock.

XXV

CARRIGAN turned slowly and looked about his room. There was no other door except one opening into a closet, and but two windows. Curtains were drawn at these windows, and he raised them. A grim smile came to his lips when he saw the white bars of tough birch nailed across each of them, outside the glass. He could see the birch had been freshly stripped of bark and had probably been nailed there that day. Carmin Fanchet and Black Roger had welcomed him to Château Boulain, but they were evidently taking no chances with their prisoner. And where was Marie-Anne?

The question was insistent, and with it remained that cold grip of something in his heart that had come with the sight of Carmin Fanchet below. Was it possible that Carmin's hatred still lived, deadlier than ever, and that with Black Roger she had plotted to bring him here so that her vengeance might be more complete—and a greater torture to him? Were they smiling and offering him their hands, even as they knew he was about to die? And if that was conceivable, what had they done with Marie-Anne?

He looked about the room. It was singularly bare, in an unusual sort of way, he thought. There were

rich rugs on the floor—three magnificent black bear-skins, and two wolf. The heads of two bucks and a splendid caribou hung against the walls. He could see, from marks on the floor, where a bed had stood, but this bed was now replaced by a couch made up comfortably for one inclined to sleep. The significance of the thing was clear—nowhere in the room could he lay his hand upon an object that might be used as a weapon!

His eyes again sought the white-birch bars of his prison, and he raised the two windows so that the cool, sweet breath of the forests reached in to him. It was then that he noticed the mosquito-proof screening nailed outside the bars. It was rather odd, this thinking of his comfort even as they planned to kill him!

If there was truth to this new suspicion that Black Roger and his mistress were plotting both vengeance and murder, their plans must also involve Marie-Anne. Suddenly his mind shot back to the raft. Had Black Roger turned a clever coup by leaving his wife there, while he came on ahead of the bateau with Carmin Fanchet? It would be several weeks before the raft reached the Yellowknife, and in that time many things might happen. The thought worried him. He was not afraid for himself. Danger, the combating of physical forces, was his business. His fear was for Marie-Anne. He had seen enough to know that Black Roger was hopelessly infatuated with Carmin Fanchet. And several things might happen aboard the raft, planned by

agents as black-souled as himself. If they killed Marie-Anne——

His hand gripped the knob of the door, and for a moment he was filled with the impulse to shout for Black Roger and face him with what was in his mind. And as he stood there, every muscle in his body ready to fight, there came to him faintly the sound of music. He heard the piano first, and then a woman's voice singing. Soon a man's voice joined the woman's, and he knew it was Black Roger, singing with Carmin Fanchet.

Suddenly the mad impulse in his heart went out, and he leaned his head nearer to the crack of the door, and strained his ears to hear. He could make out no word of the song, yet the singing came to him with a thrill that set his lips apart and brought a staring wonder into his eyes. In the room below him, fifteen hundred miles from civilization, Black Roger and Carmin Fanchet were singing "Home, Sweet Home!"

An hour later David looked through one of the barred windows upon a world lighted by a splendid moon. He could see the dark edge of the distant forest that rimmed in the château, and about him seemed to be a level meadow, with here and there the shadow of a building in which the lights were out. Stars were thick in the sky, and a strange quietness hovered over the world he looked upon. From below him floated up now and then a perfume of tobacco smoke. The guard under his window was awake, but he made no sound.

A little later he undressed, put out the two lights in his room, and stretched himself between the cool, white sheets on the couch. After a time he slept, but it was a restless slumber filled with troubled dreams. Twice he was half awake, and the second time it seemed to him his nostrils sensed a sharper tang of smoke than that of burning tobacco, yet he did not fully rouse himself, and the hours passed, and new sounds and smells that rose in the night impinged themselves upon him only as a part of the troublous fabric of his dreams. But at last there came a shock, something which beat over these things which chained him, and seized upon his consciousness, demanding that he rouse himself, open his eyes, and get up.

He obeyed the command, and before he was fully awake, found himself on his feet. It was still dark, but he heard voices, voices no longer subdued, but filled with a wild note of excitement and command. And what he smelled was not the smell of tobacco smoke! It was heavy in his room. It filled his lungs. His eyes were smarting with the sting of it.

Then came vision, and with a startled cry he leaped to a window. To the north and east he looked out upon a flaming world!

With his fist he rubbed his smarting eyes. The moon was gone. The gray he saw outside must be the coming of dawn, ghostly with that mist of smoke that had come into his room. He could see shadowy figures of men running swiftly in and out and disappearing,

and he could hear the voices of women and children, and from beyond the edge of the forest to the west came the howling of many dogs. One voice rose above the others. It was Black Roger's, and at its commands little groups of figures shot out into the gray smoke-gloom and did not appear again.

North and east the sky was flaming sullen red, and a breath of air blowing gently in David's face told him the direction of the wind. The château lay almost in the center of the growing line of conflagration.

He dressed himself and went again to the window. Quite distinctly now, he could make out Joe Clamart under his window, running toward the edge of the forest at the head of half a dozen men and boys who carried axes and cross-cut saws over their shoulders. It was the last of Black Roger's people that he saw for some time in the open meadow, but from the front of the château he could hear many voices, chiefly of women and children, and guessed it was from there that the final operations against the fire were being directed. The wind was blowing stronger in his face. With it came a sharper tang of smoke, and the widening light of day was fighting to hold its own against the deepening pall of flame-lit gloom advancing with the wind.

There seemed to come a low and distant sound with that wind, so indistinct that to David's ears it was like a murmur a thousand miles away. He strained his ears to hear, and as he listened, there came another

sound—a moaning, sobbing voice below his window! It was grief he heard now, something that went to his heart and held him cold and still. The voice was sobbing like that of a child, yet he knew it was not a child's. Nor was it a woman's. A figure came out slowly in his view, humped over, twisted in its shape, and he recognized André, the Broken Man. David could see that he was crying like a child, and he was facing the flaming forests, with his arms reaching out to them in his moaning. Then, of a sudden, he gave a strange cry, as if defiance had taken the place of grief, and he hurried across the meadow and disappeared into the timber where a great lightning-riven spruce gleamed dully white through the settling veil of smoke-mist.

For a space David looked after him, a strange beating in his heart. It was as if he had seen a little child going into the face of a deadly peril, and at last he shouted out for some one to bring back the Broken Man. But there was no answer from under his window. The guard was gone. Nothing lay between him and escape—if he could force the white birch bars from the window.

He thrust himself against them, using his shoulder as a battering-ram. Not the thousandth part of an inch could he feel them give, yet he worked until his shoulder was sore. Then he paused and studied the bars more carefully. Only one thing would avail him, and that was some object which he might use as a lever.

He looked about him, and not a thing was there in the room to answer the purpose. Then his eyes fell on the splendid horns of the caribou head. Black Roger's discretion had failed him there, and eagerly David pulled the head down from the wall. He knew the woodsman's trick of breaking off a horn from the skull, yet in this room, without log or root to help him, the task was difficult, and it was a quarter of an hour after he had last seen the Broken Man before he stood again at the window with the caribou horn in his hands. He no longer had to hold his breath to hear the low moaning in the wind, and where there had been smoke-gloom before there were now black clouds rolling and twisting up over the tops of the north and eastern forests, as if mighty breaths were playing with them from behind.

David thrust the big end of the caribou horn between two of the white-birch bars, but before he had put his weight to the lever he heard a great voice coming round the end of the château, and it was calling for André, the Broken Man. In a moment it was followed by Black Roger Audemard, who ran under the window and faced the lightning-struck spruce as he shouted André's name again.

Suddenly David called down to him, and Black Roger turned and looked up through the smoke-gloom, his head bare, his arms naked, and his eyes gleaming wildly as he listened.

"He went that way twenty minutes ago," David shouted. "He disappeared into the forest where you

see the dead spruce yonder. And he was crying, Black Roger—he was crying like a child."

If there had been other words to finish, Black Roger would not have heard them. He was running toward the old spruce, and David saw him disappear where the Broken Man had gone. Then he put his weight on the horn, and one of the tough birch bars gave way slowly, and after that a second was wrenched loose, and a third, until the lower half of the window was free of them entirely. He thrust out his head and found no one within the range of his vision. Then he worked his way through the window, feet first, and hanging the length of arms and body from the lower sill, dropped to the ground.

Instantly he faced the direction taken by Roger Audemard, it was *his* turn now, and he felt a savage thrill in his blood. For an instant he hesitated, held by the impulse to rush to Carmin Fanchet and with his fingers at her throat, demand what she and her paramour had done with Marie-Anne. But the mighty determination to settle it all with Black Roger himself overwhelmed that impulse like an inundation. Black Roger had gone into the forest. He was separated from his people, and the opportunity was at hand.

Positive that Marie-Anne had been left with the raft, the thought that the Château Boulain might be devoured by the onrushing conflagration did not appal David. The château held little interest for him now.

It was Black Roger he wanted. As he ran toward the old spruce, he picked up a club that lay in the path.

This path was a faintly-worn trail where it entered the forest beyond the spruce, very narrow, and with brush hanging close to the sides of it, so that David knew it was not in general use and that but few feet had ever used it. He followed swiftly, and in five minutes came suddenly out into a great open thick with smoke, and here he saw why Château Boulain would not burn. The break in the forest was a clearing a rifle-shot in width, free of brush and grass, and partly tilled; and it ran in a semi-circle as far as he could see through the smoke in both directions. Thus had Black Roger safeguarded his wilderness castle, while providing tillable fields for his people; and as David followed the faintly beaten path, he saw green stuffs growing on both sides of him, and through the center of the clearing a long strip of wheat, green and very thick. Up and down through the fog of smoke he could hear voices, and he knew it was this great, circular fire-clearing the people of Château Boulain were watching and guarding.

But he saw no one as he trailed across the open. In soft patches of the earth he found footprints deeply made and wide apart, the footprints of hurrying men, telling him Black Roger and the Broken Man were both ahead of him, and that Black Roger was running when he crossed the clearing.

The footprints led him to a still more indistinct trail

in the farther forest, a trail which went straight into the face of the fire ahead. He followed it. The distant murmur had grown into a low moaning over the tree-tops, and with it the wind was coming stronger, and the smoke thicker. For a mile he continued along the path, and then he stopped, knowing he had come to the dead-line. Over him was a swirling chaos. The fire-wind had grown into a roar before which the tree-tops bent as if struck by a gale, and in the air he breathed he could feel a swiftly growing heat. For a space he stood there, breathing quickly in the face of a mighty peril. Where had Black Roger and the Broken Man gone? What mad impulse could it be that dragged them still farther into the path of death? Or had they struck aside from the trail? Was he alone in danger?

As if in answer to the questions there came from far ahead of him a loud cry. It was Black Roger's voice, and as he listened, it called over and over again the Broken Man's name,

"André—André—André——"

Something in the cry held Carrigan. There was a note of terror in it, a wild entreaty that was almost drowned in the trembling wind and the moaning that was in the air. David was ready to turn back. He had already approached too near to the red line of death, yet that cry of Black Roger urged him on like the lash of a whip. He plunged ahead into the chaos of smoke, no longer able to distinguish a trail under his feet. Twice again in as many minutes he heard Black Roger's voice, and ran straight toward it. The blood

of the hunter rushed over all other things in his veins. The man he wanted was ahead of him and the moment had passed when danger or fear of death could drive him back. Where Black Roger lived, he could live, and he gripped his club and ran through the low brush that whipped in stinging lashes against his face and hands.

He came to the foot of a ridge, and from the top of this he knew Black Roger had called. It was a huge hog's-back, rising a hundred feet up out of the forest, and when he reached the top of it, he was panting for breath. It was as if he had come suddenly within the blast of a hot furnace. North and east the forest lay under him, and only the smoke obstructed his vision. But through this smoke he could make out a thing that made him rub his eyes in a fierce desire to see more clearly. A mile away, perhaps two, the conflagration seemed to be splitting itself against the tip of a mighty wedge. He could hear the roar of it to the right of him and to the left, but dead ahead there was only a moaning whirlpool of fire-heated wind and smoke. And out of this, as he looked, came again the cry,

"André—André—André!"

Again he stared north and south through the smoke-gloom. Mountains of resinous clouds, black as ink, were swirling skyward along the two sides of the giant wedge. Under that death-pall the flames were sweeping through the spruce and cedar tops like race-horses, hidden from his eyes. If they closed in there could be no escape; in fifteen minutes they would inundate

him, and it would take him half an hour to reach the safety of the clearing.

His heart thumped against his ribs as he hurried down the ridge in the direction of Black Roger's voice. The giant wedge of the forest was not burning—yet, and Audemard was hurrying like mad toward the tip of that wedge, crying out now and then the name of the Broken Man. And always he kept ahead, until at last—a mile from the ridge—David came to the edge of a wide stream and saw what it was that made the wedge of forest. For under his eyes the stream split, and two arms of it widened out, and along each shore of the two streams was a wide fire-clearing made by the axes of Black Roger's people, who had foreseen this day when fire might sweep their world.

Carrigan dashed water into his eyes, and it was warm. Then he looked across. The fire had passed, the pall of smoke was clearing away, and what he saw was the black corpse of a world that had been green. It was smoldering; the deep mold was afire. Little tongues of flame still licked at ten thousand stubs charred by the fire-death—and there was no wind here, and only the whisper of a distant moaning sweeping farther and farther away.

And then, out of that waste across the river, David heard a terrible cry. It was Black Roger, still calling —even in that place of hopeless death—for André, the Broken Man!

XXVI

INTO the stream Carrigan plunged and found it only waist-deep in crossing. He saw where Black Roger had come out of the water and where his feet had plowed deep in the ash and char and smoldering débris ahead. This trail he followed. The air he breathed was hot and filled with stifling clouds of ash and char-dust and smoke. His feet struck red-hot embers under the ash, and he smelled burning leather. A forest of spruce and cedar skeletons still crackled and snapped and burst out into sudden tongues of flame about him, and the air he breathed grew hotter, and his face burned, and into his eyes came a smarting pain —when ahead of him he saw Black Roger. He was no longer calling out the Broken Man's name, but was crashing through the smoking chaos like a great beast that had gone both blind and mad. Twice David turned aside where Black Roger had rushed through burning débris, and a third time, following where Audemard had gone, his feet felt the sudden stab of living coals. In another moment he would have shouted Black Roger's name, but even as the words were on his lips, mingled with a gasp of pain, the giant river-man stopped where the forest seemed suddenly to end in a ghostly, smoke-filled space, and when David came

up behind him, he was standing at the black edge of a cliff which leaped off into a smoldering valley below.

Out of this narrow valley between two ridges, an hour ago choked with living spruce and cedar, rose up a swirling, terrifying heat. Down into this pit of death Black Roger stood looking, and David heard a strange moaning coming in his breath. His great, bare arms were black and scarred with heat; his hair was burned; his shirt was torn from his shoulders. When David spoke—and Black Roger turned at the sound—his eyes glared wildly out of a face that was like a black mask. And when he saw it was David who had spoken, his great body seemed to sag, and with an unintelligible cry he pointed down.

David, staring, saw nothing with his half-blind eyes, but under his feet he felt a sudden giving way, and the fire-eaten tangle of earth and roots broke off like a rotten ledge, and with it both he and Black Roger went crashing into the depths below, smothered in an avalanche of ash and sizzling earth. At the bottom David lay for a moment, partly stunned. Then his fingers clutched a bit of living fire, and with a savage cry he staggered to his feet and looked to see Black Roger. For a space his eyes were blinded, and when at last he could see, he made out Black Roger, fifty feet away, dragging himself on his hands and knees through the blistering muck of the fire. And then, as he stared, the stricken giant came to the charred remnant of a stump and crumpled over it with a great cry, moaning again that name——

"André—André——"

David hurried to him, and as he put his hands under Black Roger's arms to help him to his feet, he saw that the charred stump was not a stump, but the fire-shriveled corpse of André, the Broken Man!

Horror choked back speech on his own lips. Black Roger looked up at him, and a great breath came in a sob out of his body. Then, suddenly, he seemed to get grip of himself, and his burned and bleeding fingers closed about David's hand at his shoulder.

"I knew he was coming here," he said, the words forcing themselves with an effort through his swollen lips. "He came home—to die."

"Home——?"

"Yes. His mother and father were buried here nearly thirty years ago, and he worshiped them. Look at him, Carrigan. Look at him closely. For he is the man you have wanted all these years, the finest man God ever made, Roger Audemard! When he saw the fire, he came to shield their graves from the flames. And now he is dead!"

A moan came to his lips, and the weight of his body grew so heavy that David had to exert his strength to keep him from falling.

"And *you?*" he cried. "For God's sake, Audemard —tell me——"

"I, m'sieu? Why, I am only St. Pierre Audemard his brother."

And with that his head dropped heavily, and he was like a dead man in David's arms.

How at last David came to the edge of the stream again, with the weight of St. Pierre Audemard on his shoulders, was a torturing nightmare which would never be quite clear in his brain. The details were obliterated in the vast agony of the thing. He knew that he fought as he had never fought before; that he stumbled again and again in the fire-muck; that he was burned, and blinded, and his brain was sick. But he held to St. Pierre, with his twisted, broken leg, knowing that he would die if he dropped him into the flesh-devouring heat of the smoldering débris under his feet. Toward the end he was conscious of St. Pierre's moaning, and then of his voice speaking to him. After that he came to the water and fell down in the edge of it with St. Pierre, and inside his head everything went as black as the world over which the fire had swept.

He did not know how terribly he was hurt. He did not feel pain after the darkness came. Yet he sensed certain things. He knew that over him St. Pierre was shouting. For days, it seemed, he could hear nothing but that great voice bellowing away in the interminable distance. And then came other voices, now near and now far, and after that he seemed to rise up and float among the clouds, and for a long time he heard no other sound and felt no movement, but was like one dead.

Something soft and gentle and comforting roused him out of darkness. He did not move, he did not open his eyes for a time, while reason came to him. He heard a voice, and it was a woman's voice, speaking

softly, and another voice replied to it. Then he heard gentle movement, and some one went away from him, and he heard the almost noiseless opening and closing of a door. A very little he began to see. He was in a room, with a patch of sunlight on the wall. Also, he was in a bed. And that gentle, comforting hand was still stroking his forehead and hair, light as thistledown. He opened his eyes wider and looked up. His heart gave a great throb. Over him was a glorious, tender face smiling like an angel into his widening eyes. And it was the face of Carmin Fanchet!

He made an effort, as if to speak.

"Hush," she whispered, and he saw something shining in her eyes, and something wet fell upon his face. "She is returning—and I will go. For three days and nights she has not slept, and she must be the first to see you open your eyes."

She bent over him. Her soft lips touched his forehead, and he heard her sobbing breath.

"God bless you, David Carrigan!"

Then she was going to the door, and his eyes dropped shut again. He began to experience pain now, a hot, consuming pain all over him, and he remembered the fight through the path of the fire. Then the door opened very softly once more, and some one came in, and knelt down at his side, and was so quiet that she scarcely seemed to breathe. He wanted to open his eyes, to cry out a name, but he waited, and lips soft as velvet touched his own. They lay there for a mo-

ment, then moved to his closed eyes, his forehead, his hair—and after that something rested gently against him.

His eyes shot open. It was Marie-Anne, with her head nestled in the crook of his arm as she knelt there beside him on the floor. He could see only a bit of her face, but her hair was very near, crumpled gloriously on his breast, and he could see the tips of her long lashes as she remained very still, seeming not to breathe. She did not know he had roused from his sleep—the first sleep of those three days of torture which he could not remember now; and he, looking at her, made no movement to tell her he was awake. One of his hands lay over the edge of the bed, and so lightly he could scarce feel the weight of her fingers she laid one of her own upon it, and a little at a time drew it to her, until the bandaged thing was against her lips. It was strange she did not hear his heart, which seemed all at once to beat like a drum inside him!

Suddenly he sensed the fact that his other hand was not bandaged. He was lying on his side, with his right arm partly under him, and against that hand he felt the softness of Marie-Anne's cheek, the velvety crush of her hair!

And then he whispered, "Marie-Anne——"

She still lay, for a moment, utterly motionless. Then, slowly, as if believing he had spoken her name in his sleep, she raised her head and looked into his wide-open eyes. There was no word between them in that breath or two. His bandaged hand and his well

hand went to her face and hair, and then a sobbing cry came from Marie-Anne, and swiftly she crushed her face down to his, holding him close with both her arms for a moment. And after that, as on that other day when she kissed him after the fight, she was up and gone so quickly that her name had scarcely left his lips when the door closed behind her, and he heard her running down the hall.

He called after her, "Marie-Anne! Marie-Anne!"

He heard another door, and voices, and quick footsteps again, coming his way, and he was waiting eagerly, half on his elbow, when into his room came Nepapinas and Carmin Fanchet. And again he saw the glory of something in the woman's face.

His eyes must have burned strangely as he stared at her, but it did not change that light in her own, and her hands were wonderfully gentle as she helped Nepapinas raise him so that he was sitting up straight, with pillows at his back.

"It doesn't hurt so much now, does it?" she asked, her voice low with a mothering tenderness.

He shook his head. "No. What is the matter?"

"You were burned—terribly. For two days and nights you were in great pain, but for many hours you have been sleeping, and Nepapinas says the burns will not hurt any more. If it had not been for you——"

She bent over him. Her hand touched his face, and now he began to understand the meaning of that glory shining in her eyes.

"If it hadn't been for you—he would have died!"

She drew back, turning to the door. "He is coming to see you—alone," she said, a little broken note in her throat. "And I pray God you will see with clear understanding, David Carrigan—and forgive me—as I have forgiven you—for a thing that happened long ago."

He waited. His head was in a jumble, and his thoughts were tumbling over one another in an effort to evolve some sort of coherence out of things amazing and unexpected. One thing was impressed upon him—he had saved St. Pierre's life, and because he had done this Carmin Fanchet was very tender to him. She had kissed him, and Marie-Anne had kissed him, and——

A strange dawning was coming to him, thrilling him to his finger-tips. He listened. A new sound was approaching from the hall. His door was opened, and a wheel-chair was rolled in by old Nepapinas. In the chair was St. Pierre Audemard. Feet and hands and arms were wrapped in bandages, but his face was uncovered and wreathed in smiling happiness when he saw David propped up against his pillows. Nepapinas rolled him close to the bed and then shuffled out, and as he closed the door, David was sure he heard the subdued whispering of feminine voices down the hall.

"How are you, David?" asked St. Pierre.

"Fine," nodded Carrigan. "And you?"

"A bit scorched, and a broken leg." He held up his padded hands. "Would be dead if you hadn't car-

ried me to the river. Carmin says she owes you her life for having saved mine."

"And Marie-Anne?"

"That's what I've come to tell you about," said St. Pierre. "The instant they knew you were able to listen, both Carmin and Marie-Anne insisted that I come and tell you things. But if you don't feel well enough to hear me now——"

"Go on!" almost threatened David.

The look of cheer which had illumined St. Pierre's face faded away, and David saw in its place the lines of sorrow which had settled there. He turned his gaze toward a window through which the afternoon sun was coming, and nodded slowly.

"You saw—out there. He's dead. They buried him in a casket made of sweet cedar. He loved the smell of that. He was like a little child. And once—a long time ago—he was a splendid man, a greater and better man than St. Pierre, his brother, will ever be. What he did was right and just, M'sieu David. He was the oldest—sixteen—when the thing happened. I was only nine, and didn't fully understand. But he saw it all—the death of our father because a powerful factor wanted my mother. And after that he knew how and why our mother died, but not a word of it did he tell us until years later—after the day of vengeance was past.

"You understand, David? He didn't want me in that. He did it alone, with good friends from the upper north. He killed the murderers of our mother

and father, and then he buried himself deeper into the forests with us, and we took our mother's family name, which was Boulain, and settled here on the Yellowknife. Roger—Black Roger, as you know him—brought the bones of our father and mother and buried them over in the edge of that plain where he died and where our first cabin stood. Five years ago a falling tree crushed him out of shape, and his mind went at the same time, so that he has been like a little child, and was always seeking for Roger Audemard—the man he once was. That was the man your law wanted, Roger Audemard. Our brother."

"*Our* brother," cried David. "Who is the other?"

"My sister."

"Yes?"

"Marie-Anne."

"Good God!" choked David. "St. Pierre, do you lie? Is this another bit of trickery?"

"It is the truth," said St. Pierre. "Marie-Anne is my sister, and Carmin—whom you saw in my arms through the cabin window——"

He paused, smiling into David's staring eyes, taking full measure of recompense in the other's heart-breaking attitude as he waited. "—Is my wife, M'sieu David."

A great gasp of breath came out of Carrigan.

"Yes, my wife, and the greatest-hearted woman that ever lived, without one exception in all the world!" cried St. Pierre, a fierce pride in his voice. "It was she, and not Marie-Anne, who shot you on that strip of

sand, David Carrigan! *Mon Dieu,* I tell you not one woman in a million would have done what she did—let you live! Why? Listen, m'sieu, and you will understand at last. She had a brother, years younger than she, and to that brother she was mother, sister, everything, because they had no parents almost from babyhood. She worshiped him. And he was bad. Yet the worse he became, the more she loved him and prayed for him. Years ago she became my wife, and I fought with her to save the brother. But he belonged to the devil hand and foot, and at last he left us and went south, and became what he was when you were sent out to get him, Sergeant Carrigan. It was then that my wife went down to make a last fight to save him, to bring him back, and you know how she made that fight, m'sieu—until the day you hanged him!"

St. Pierre was leaning from his chair, his face ablaze. "Tell me, did she not fight?" he cried. "And *you,* until the last—did you not fight to have her put behind prison bars with her brother?"

"Yes, it is so," murmured Carrigan.

"She hated you," went on St. Pierre. "You hanged her brother, who was almost a part of her flesh and body. He was bad, but he had been hers from babyhood, and a mother will love her son if he is a devil. And then—I won't take long to tell the rest of it! Through friends she learned that you, who had hanged her brother, were on your way to run down Roger Audemard. And Roger Audemard, mind you, was the

same as myself, for I had sworn to take my brother's place if it became necessary. She was on the bateau with Marie-Anne when the messenger came. She had but one desire—to save me—to kill you. If it had been some other man, but it was you, who had hanged her brother! She disappeared from the bateau that day with a rifle. You know, M'sieu David, what happened. Marie-Anne heard the shooting and came—alone—just as you rolled out in the sand as if dead. It was she who ran out to you first, while my Carmin crouched there with her rifle, ready to send another bullet into you if you moved. It was Marie-Anne you saw standing over you, it was she who knelt down at your side, and then——"

St. Pierre paused, and he smiled, and then grimaced as he tried to rub his two bandaged hands together. "David, fate mixes things up in a funny way. My Carmin came out and stood over you, hating you; and Marie-Anne knelt down there at your side, loving you. Yes, it is true. And over you they fought for life or death, and love won, because it is always stronger than hate. Besides, as you lay there bleeding and helpless, you looked different to my Carmin than as you did when you hanged her brother. So they dragged you up under a tree, and after that they plotted together and planned, while I was away up the river on the raft. The feminine mind works strangely, M'sieu David, and perhaps it was that thing we call intuition which made them do what they did. Marie-Anne knew it would never do for you to see and recognize my Car-

min, so in their scheming of things she insisted on passing herself off as my wife, while my Carmin came back in a canoe to meet me. They were frightened, and when I came, the whole thing had gone too far for me to mend, and I knew the false game must be played out to the end. When I saw what was happening—that you loved Marie-Anne so well that you were willing to fight for her honor even when you thought she was my wife—I was sure it would all end well. But I could take no chances until I knew. And so there were bars at your windows, and——"

St. Pierre shrugged his shoulders, and the lines of grief came into his face again, and in his voice was a little break as he continued: "If Roger had not gone out there to fight back the flames from the graves of his dead, I had planned to tell you as much as I dared, M'sieu David, and I had faith that your love for our sister would win. I did not tell you on the river because I wanted you to see with your own eyes our paradise up here, and I knew you would not destroy it once you were a part of it. And so I could not tell you Carmin was my wife, for that would have betrayed us —and—besides—that fight of yours against a love which you thought was dishonest interested me very much, for I saw in it a wonderful test of the man who might become my brother if he chose wisely between love and what he thought was duty. I loved you for it, even when you sat me there on the sand like a silly loon. And now, even my Carmin loves you for bringing me out of the fire—— But you are not listening!"

David was looking past him toward the door, and St. Pierre smiled when he saw the look that was in his face.

"Nepapinas!" he called loudly. "Nepapinas!"

In a moment there was shuffling of feet outside, and Nepapinas came in. St. Pierre held out his two great, bandaged hands, and David met them with his own, one bandaged and one free. Not a word was spoken between them, but their eyes were the eyes of men between whom had suddenly come the faith and understanding of a brotherhood as strong as life itself.

Then Nepapinas wheeled St. Pierre from the room, and David straightened himself against his pillows, and waited, and listened, until it seemed two hearts were thumping inside him in the place of one.

It was an interminable time, he thought, before Marie-Anne stood in the doorway. For a breath she paused there, looking at him as he stretched out his bandaged arm to her, moved by every yearning impulse in her soul to come in, yet ready as a bird to fly away. And then, as he called her name, she ran to him and dropped upon her knees at his side, and his arms went about her, insensible to their hurt—and her hot face was against his neck, and his lips crushed in the smothering sweetness of her hair. He made no effort to speak, beyond that first calling of her name. He could feel her heart throbbing against him, and her hands tightened at his shoulders, and at last she raised her glorious face so near that the breath of it was on his lips. Then, seeing what was in his eyes, her soft mouth

quivered in a little smile, and with a broken throb in her throat she whispered,

"Has it all ended—right—David?"

He drew the red mouth to his own, and with a glad cry which was no word in itself he buried his face in the lustrous tresses he loved. Afterward he could not remember all it was that he said, but at the end Marie-Anne had drawn a little away so that she was looking at him, her eyes shining gloriously and her cheeks beautiful as the petals of a wild rose. And he could see the throbbing in her white throat, like the beating of a tiny heart.

"And you'll take me with you?" she whispered joyously.

"Yes; and when I show you to the old man—Superintendent McVane, you know—and tell him you're my wife, he can't go back on his promise. He said if I settled this Roger Audemard affair, I could have anything I might ask for. And I'll ask for my discharge. I ought to have it in September, and that will give us time to return before the snow flies. You see——"

He held out his arms again. "You see," he cried, his face smothered in her hair again, "I've found the place of my dreams up here, and I want to stay—always. Are you a little glad, Marie-Anne?"

In a great room at the end of the hall, with windows opening in three directions upon the wilderness, St. Pierre waited in his wheel-chair, grunting uneasily now and then at the long time it was taking Carmin to discover certain things out in the hall. Finally he heard

her coming, tiptoeing very quietly from the direction of David Carrigan's door, and St. Pierre chuckled and tried to rub his bandaged hands when she came in, her face pink and her eyes shining with the greatest thrill that can stir a feminine heart.

"If we'd only known," he tried to whisper, "I would have had the keyhole made larger, *Cherie!* He deserves it for having spied on us at the cabin window. But—tell me!—Could you see? Did you hear? What——"

Carmin's soft hand went over his mouth. "In another moment you'll be shouting," she warned. "Maybe I didn't see, and maybe I didn't hear, Big Bear—but I know there are four very happy people in Château Boulain. And now, if you want to guess who is the happiest——"

"I am, *chere-cœur.*"

"No."

"Well, then, if you insist—*you* are."

"Yes. And the next?"

St. Pierre chuckled. "David Carrigan," he said.

"No, no, no! If you mean that——"

"I mean—always—that I am second, unless you will ever let me be first," corrected St. Pierre, kissing the hand that was gently stroking his cheek.

And then he leaned his great head back against her where she stood behind him, and Carmin's fingers ran where his hair was crisp with the singe of fire, and for a long time they said no other word, but let their eyes rest upon the dim length of the hall at the far end of which was David Carrigan's room.

DATE DUE	BORROWER'S NAME
2-18-47	Albrecht
9/27/47	De. Mushkatin

Curwood
North-country omnibus

copy 1